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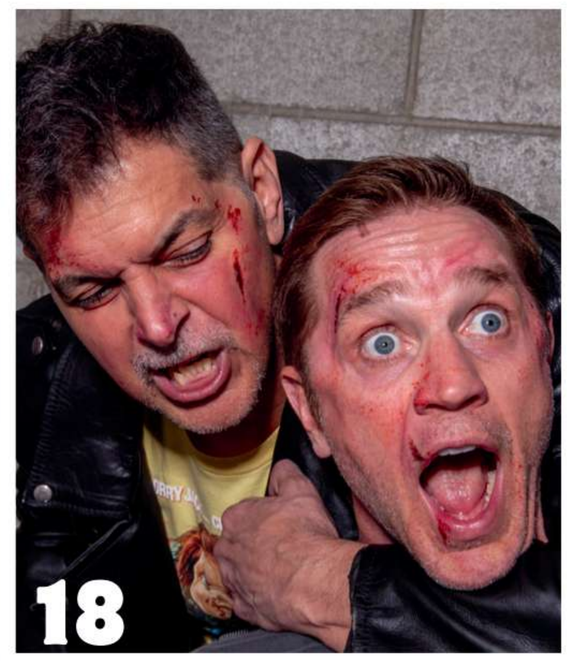

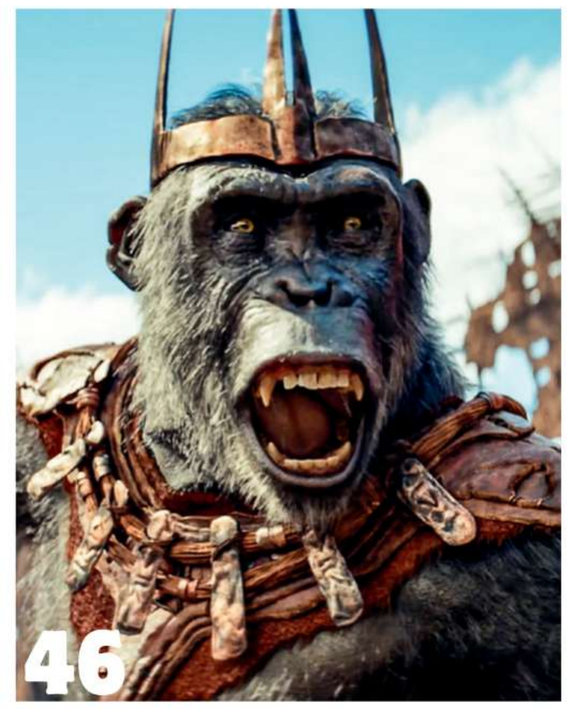

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Tara Ansley & Abhi Goel

Editor-In-Chief
Phil Nobile Jr.

Creative Director
Jason Kauzlarich

Senior Editor
Meredith Borders

Contributing Editors
Kolleen Carney-Hoepfner
Liz Duston
Jordan Hoffman
Blayne Waterloo

Contributors
Sean Abley
Bridgett Acuna
Erica Bunny Armendariz
Jason Baker
Mackenzie Bartlett
Abbey Bender
Brian W. Collins
Barbara Crampton
Dane DiLiegro
Ahlissa Eichhorn
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This issue is dedicated to John A. Buckley III, David Emge, Samuel Glass Jr., Kristin Kreepykrull, and David J. Skal.

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INVOCATION

I Know I'm Human

"I know I'm human," as uttered by Kurt Russell's MacReady in John Carpenter's *The Thing*, is such an underrated, potent line. Just four words, but a smart and needed narrative beat, a grounding after we've witnessed some of the craziest shit movie screens had ever shown us up to that point. It's a psychlogical reset. *Okay, that happened. Let's start over: I know I'm human.* It's a protagonist trying to get the ground back under his feet, trying to get his head around an entirely new reality.

I think about that line and that moment a lot lately, as our previously agreed upon rules all seem to go out the window, especially in the entertainment industry. For example: it was once unthinkable that a studio would spend nearly 100 miliion dollars on a movie, only to erase that movie from existence instead of releasing it, all in the name of a tax write-off. Now it's a fate that's seemingly on the table for any movie created within an increasingly broken studio system.

I think about that line when I see my peers being ground up in an SEO-driven machine that's racing to the bottom, taking part in their own extinction level event for one more paycheck and serving up listicles that will, in 12 months' time, be written by the AI that replaced them.

And I think about that line when I see dozens of AI-generated social media posts, with hundreds of AI-generated replies under them — zeroes and ones arguing or agreeing with other zeroes and ones (or shilling N U D E S I N B I O). The bots have taken over and are trying to blur the line between themselves and real people. To borrow another line from *The Thing*, trust is a tough thing to come by these days.

But through this shift, I've noticed something interesting: all the horror brands seem, so far, unwilling to go down that AI road. Not to speak for our neighbors, but I see *Rue Morgue*, *Bloody Disgusting*, *Horrorhound*, *Delirium*, *Diabolique*, *Dread Central* and others resisting this trend and working to #KeepHorrorHuman (yes, I made up a hashtag), and it makes me proud. Maybe it's because, while AI can be accidentally scary, only another human being can understand what it means to be scared. Perhaps it's because horror fans and brands revere human creativity in a way other outlets never did. That's just baked into our fandom; horror fans like our FX practical, and our writing human. Makes sense!

But as more and more brands succumb, it becomes all the more important to take a stand and to support the humans who are holding the line on this stuff. I've always said I don't take our readers for granted, but that's never been more true than it is now, and our future depends on that feeling being mutual.

#KeepHorrorHuman

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
Hit us up at **MAIL@fangoria.com**

CAT DEAD, DETAILS... NEVER?

After watching *Smile*, I've reached my limit on cat-related violence in horror movies. At this point, it would be more shocking to introduce a cat at the beginning of a film and have it survive. When will we be done with this predictable trope? The Jonesys and Binxes are sadly few and far between. Many of us horror fans are proud cat parents, and this Argento-inspired feline cruelty can only ruin the mood and take us out of a movie.
- Dan Thompson

Dan, your opinion is one shared by many horror fans (and more than a few filmmakers!), but even though I love animals to my core, make-believe movie violence against them has just never been an issue for me. If one's empathy for a living creature is this intense, how does one get past the violence visited upon all the human beings in horror? (Speaking only for myself, my empathy toward Barbara Crampton's Megan in Re-Animator *was much, much greater than my empathy for Rufus the cat in that same film.) And what's with the discrimination here? Save the cat; screw the pooch? (I kid, I kid.)*

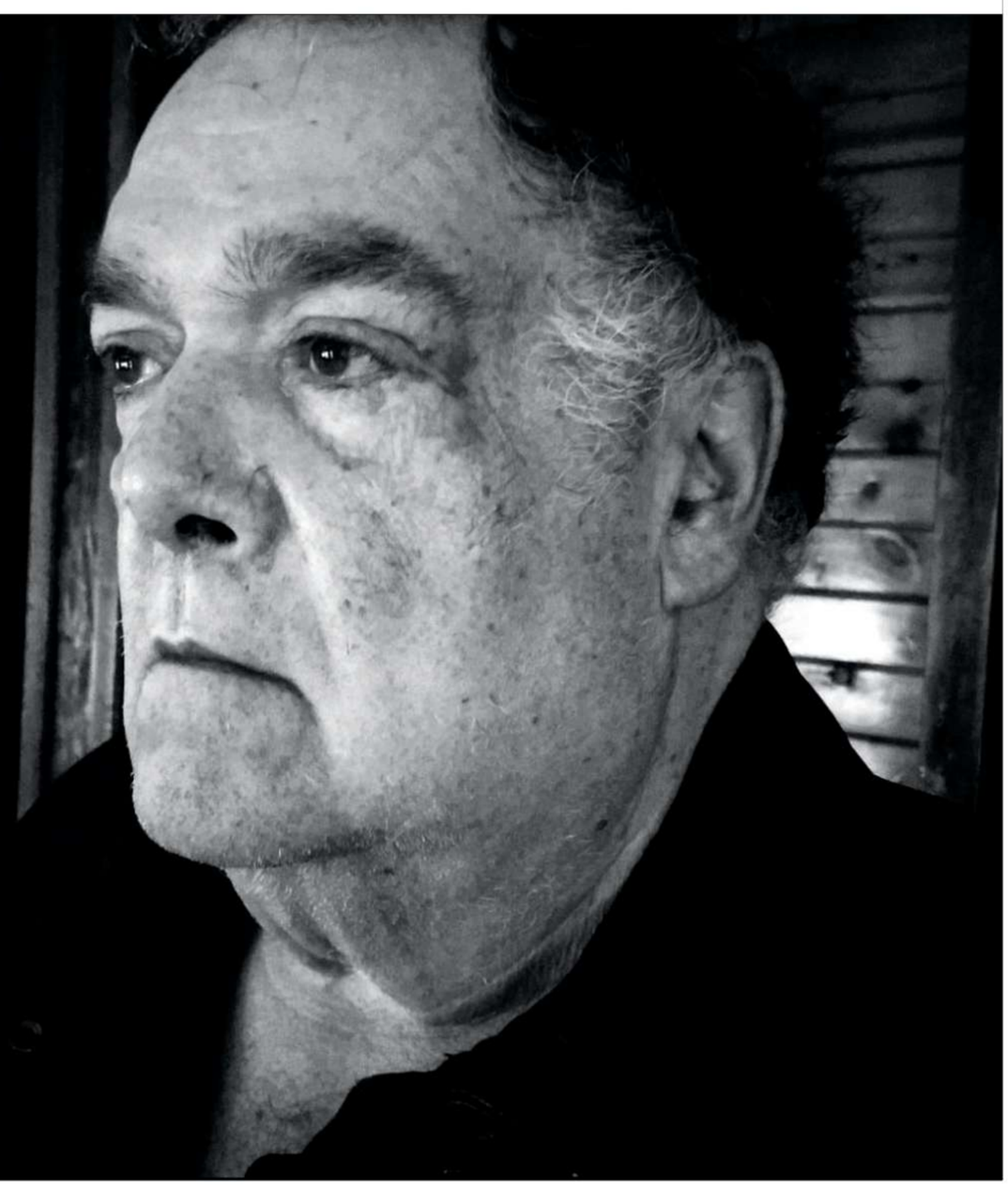
Empathy is an essential human trait, and I'm glad you have it. And I'd argue that empathy is what makes horror so effective. Bad things happen in horror movies, and we feel, well, horror at the sight of it, y'know? But our sensitivity around animal violence is such that festivals now ruin (yes, I said ruin) screenings by warning you ahead of time if there's an animal death. 35 people might die horribly in this movie, but we need a heads up before the titles that the one rabbit in the movie is gonna get got. Now the audience spends half the movie waiting for said animal to show up as foretold by the content warning prophecy, and the other half waiting for it to take its telegraphed dirt nap. A prolonged distraction, followed by a scene robbed of any tension. Filmmakers can't be happy about this! - PN

FAREWELL TO A FANGO FATHER

FANGORIA bids farewell to Jersey City legend and horror fan Joseph A. Buckley III (1946–2024), father of Fango contributor and film producer Heather Buckley. Joseph always supported Heather and her sister Regina in their dreams. Heather will forever be grateful for him taking her as a little girl to Jack's Stationery in Keyport, NJ to buy issues of FANGORIA and to New York City for the FANGORIA Weekend of Horrors conventions.

Joseph's favorites were the Frankenstein Monster and Mighty Joe Young. He also admired Tom Savini's shotgun-blast-to-the-head effect in the William Lustig / Joe Spinell *Maniac* (1980) for being "very realistic."

WANTED! MORE READERS LIKE: JOSEPH A. BUCKLEY III (1946-2024)



MONSTER INVASION

THE COFFEE TABLE: HOW A SMALL SPANISH INDIE HORROR BECAME THE FEEL-BAD HIT OF THE YEAR

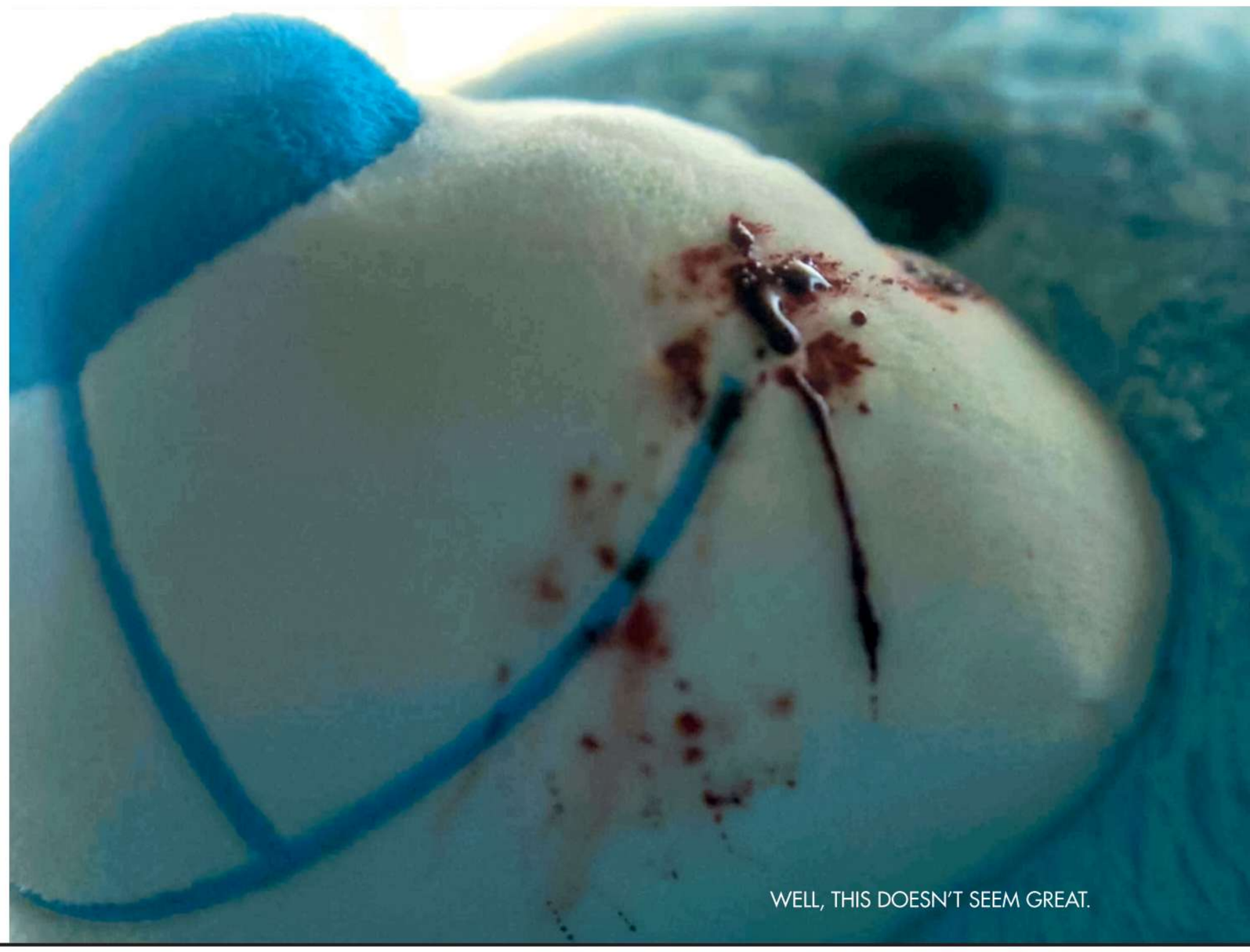
By Amber T

Director Caye Casas talks to us about his festival fave that takes no prisoners.

THE VANISHING. SPEAK NO EVIL. FUNNY GAMES. **EUROPE HAS PRODUCED SOME OF THE MOST UNSETTLING HORROR AND GENRE MOVIES OF ALL TIME. ACROSS ALL COUNTRIES, EUROPEAN DIRECTORS JUST *GET IT* – IF YOU WANT TO SHAKE AN AUDIENCE, YOU GOTTA GO TO SOME TRULY DARK PLACES. CAYE CASAS' PITCH-BLACK SPANISH FARCICAL HORROR *THE COFFEE TABLE* IS NO EXCEPTION. SINCE ITS NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE AT FANTASTIC FEST, THE TALE OF ONE COUPLE'S DECISION TO BRING HOME A NEW PIECE OF FURNITURE HAS LEFT AUDIENCES SHOCKED, NAUSEOUS AND EVEN IN TEARS.**

A simple plot synopsis is the most anyone should know about this movie before going into it (and so we'll keep this interview spoiler-free), but to add a little more detail: *The Coffee Table* follows María (Estefanía de los Santos) and Jesús (David Pareja), a married couple who have just welcomed their infant son into the world. Exhausted and exasperated, as any first-time parents would be, the couple's relationship is tested even further when Jesús insists on purchasing a tacky, garish new table for their home. A jaw-dropping twist turns an innocuous furnishing decision into life-altering horror, leaving audiences watching through their fingers as Jesús' life quickly turns into a waking nightmare.

And just when you think things can't get any worse, they do.



WELL, THIS DOESN'T SEEM GREAT.

The Coffee Table is truly a movie like no other. Where did the idea for this film come from?

The idea came from wanting to make the scariest film of the year without it being a typical horror film. Without the clichés of the genre, without monsters, zombies, ghosts, or murderers – real terror without artifice. Showing that what is scariest is destiny and how cruel life can be to any of us. It is also important to keep in mind that it is a film shot in just ten days, in a friend's apartment, with almost no budget. It was the only way to make the film since no one wanted to produce it and even big distributors told us that the film should not exist. But it exists, and has become the most awarded genre film in the world in 2023!

JESÚS (DAVID PAREJA) REALLY SHOULD HAVE PAID THE EXTRA ASSEMBLY FEE.

> **Since we were doing something so humble, we said, 'Let's do the most unforgettable, cruel and politically incorrect thing we [can]...' and that's what we did!**
>
> **- Caye Casas**

A quick glance at _The Coffee Table_'s reviews reveals some intense reactions: many leaving their screenings traumatized, shocked and some even having full panic attacks. What have some of your favorite audience reactions been so far?

People's reactions are unique and sensational. Someone always leaves the room at the fifteen-minute mark, and there are comments like, 'It's the cruelest thing I've ever seen,' 'I've never suffered so much in 90 minutes' or 'I was wishing for the movie to end, it was torture, but I couldn't leave without knowing the ending.'

Pareja and de los Santos feel so natural as a couple. They're both flawed and, at times, irritating – yet we as an audience are forced to go with them through the worst thing that could ever happen to anyone. That's no mean feat for an actor – how did you know they were right for the roles?

I wrote the lead role for David. I had worked with him on my first film, *Killing God*, and I loved it, so

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAYE CASAS

YOU KNOW HOW A PIECE OF FURNITURE CAN TIE A ROOM TOGETHER? THIS IS THE OPPOSITE OF THAT.

I decided that he would be the lead in my second film. With Estefanía, I didn't know her, but I admired her, and I sent her the script. She read it, and the next day she sent me an angry voicemail saying, 'You're crazy, you're a son of a bitch, this is a sin' – but after insulting me she told me, 'I've never read something so powerful. I want to star in it!' So she came and we rehearsed for three days. One of the things I work the most on is choosing the actors because it is key for the film to work.

In screenings for this film, audiences stifle their laughter, as if they're afraid of finding the movie funny, even though, in parts, it's hilarious. Would you classify *The Coffee Table* as a comedy movie?

For me it is an enormous tragedy, but it has moments of the blackest humor imaginable. I have been lucky enough to see the film at many festivals around the world; in Mexico they laughed a lot at the film, but in Estonia their blood ran cold. I look for all kinds of reactions, and depending on who you are, your reactions to this movie may be many, but ultimately it's the worst 90 minutes of their life in a movie theater. Or so many tell me! [*laughs*]

Despite horror pushing the boundaries of good taste more than other genres, there are some taboos that most filmmakers still won't touch. *The Coffee Table* not only breaks one of these taboos, but revels in the anxiety-inducing aftermath. What are some other taboo-busting movies that influenced you?

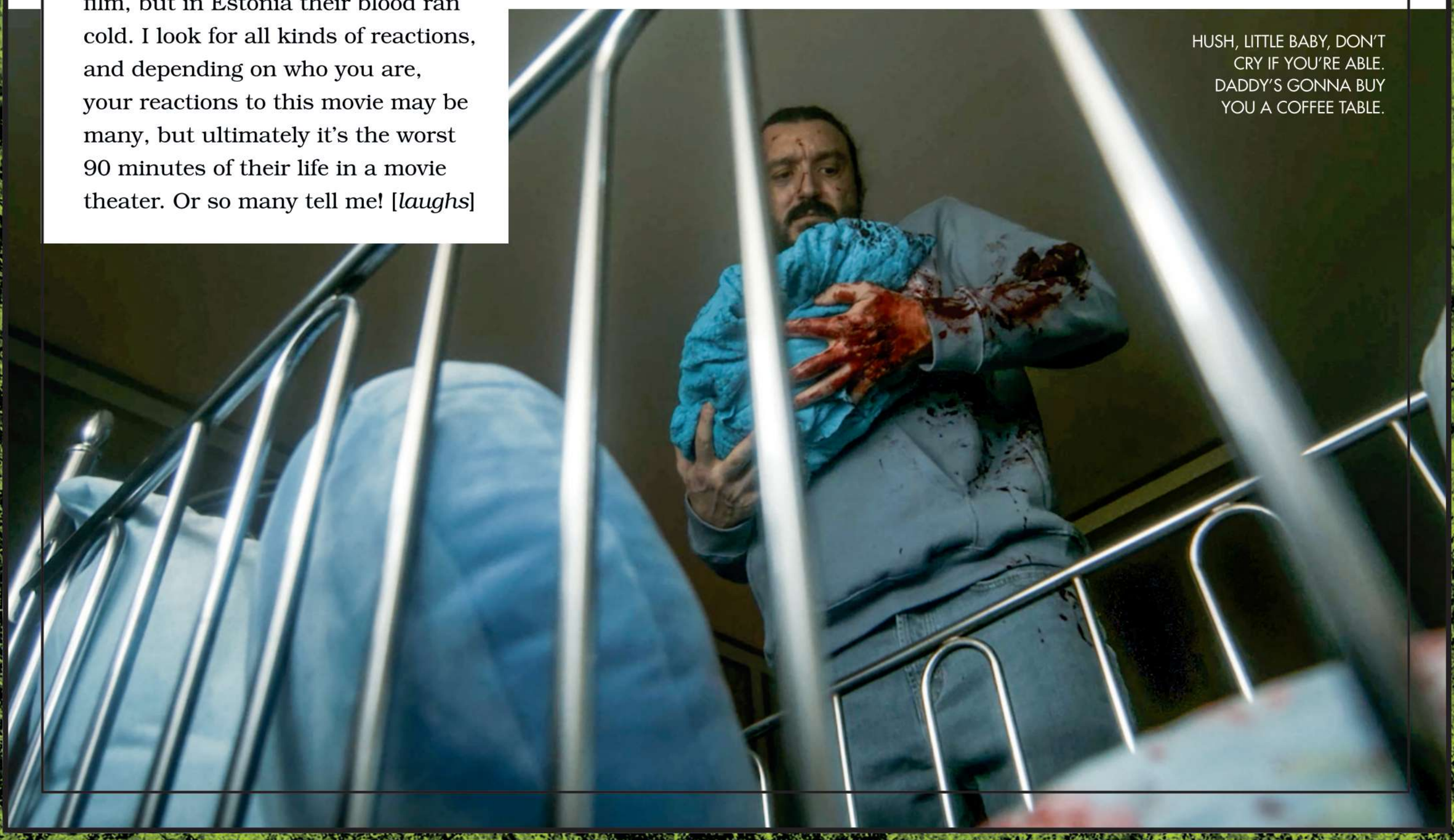
Break that great taboo! Someone who breaks taboos and is a master of risky and unforgettable cinema is Todd Solondz [*Happiness*]. When I see his movies, my head explodes and I feel strong emotions, and that's what I want to achieve, for people to live a unique and unforgettable experience. One of the new horror directors I admire is Demián Rugna [*Terrified*, *When Evil Lurks*], and on top of that I am lucky to be his friend.

Did you always intend to make a movie that would shock an audience to this degree?

Yes. I had no choice but to make a film with very few resources and a low budget. Since we were doing something so humble, we said, 'Let's do the most unforgettable, cruel and politically incorrect thing we [can]…' and that's what we did! I think that is the key to the film's success among fans, although it is also true that the industry is afraid to bet on our cruel story. It is incredible to see the faces of people leaving the cinema when the film ends; it seems as if they have been tortured. As a journalist said, 'At least once in your life you have to live *The Coffee Table* Experience.'

It's going to be a challenge to follow up something like *The Coffee Table*! Do you plan to keep shocking audiences with your next project? How are you going to go even further next time?

I just finished another horror script. It's also a cruel horror, but more commercial. If I manage to make it, I am sure it will become the horror film of the year. It is original, spectacular, violent, philosophical and bloody. I love it; it will be a success if it can be done. But this is not low budget. Whoever gives me the chance to do it will have a gem on their hands, I promise you!



HUSH, LITTLE BABY, DON'T CRY IF YOU'RE ABLE. DADDY'S GONNA BUY YOU A COFFEE TABLE.

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The Contradictions Of Oscar

By the time you read this, the 96th Academy Awards will have been handed out, but right now, I and a lot of other kaiju fans are basking in the radioactive glow of *Godzilla Minus One* landing a Best Visual Effects nomination. There's no guarantee it's going to win — though you never know; there's no clear front-runner in the category — but just the fact that the Big G won a place in the top five is plenty exciting. Judging by the applause and cheers from the audience at the nominations announcement when *Minus One* was named, many in the industry are thrilled as well. It's especially noteworthy since none of the three Warner Bros. Discovery/Legendary MonsterVerse vehicles for the prehistoric titan managed Oscar noms, though their first *Godzilla* and *Godzilla vs. Kong* did make it to the shortlists. (*Godzilla: King of the Monsters* somehow didn't land a place on that list in the same year *Cats* did.).

Even as we were celebrating the nomination of a Japanese production — one done on a fraction of the budget of its competition in the category — some thought it should have gotten more: a nod for Best International Feature Film or even Best Picture. Sadly, *Godzilla Minus One* wasn't eligible in the former; each country submits one film a year for consideration in that slot, and this time, Japan's entry was the drama *Perfect Days*, directed by international festival and art-house darling Wim Wenders. This selection was made back in September 2023, months before *Minus One* became a surprise box-office hit in the States; at this writing, it looks like a lock to pass *Life Is Beautiful*'s $57.2 million to become the second highest-grossing foreign language film in U.S. history, behind *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

In the end, some would argue, isn't such massive popular acceptance reward enough in the long run, guaranteeing it a longer life in audiences' minds than one award could? And I can't say I dispute that sentiment. I completely agree with whoever it was (I can't recall or track the name down) that once said, "Awards are just the first draft of film history." That chronicle is full of movies that were overlooked by Oscar and went on to become enduring classics or cult favorites and films that did take the big prizes but have been forgotten over time. Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick never won competitive Academy Awards for directing, among many much-cited examples.

And yet, even as past years' Oscars begin their slip back to trivia status, I can't deny getting caught up in each new year's excitement over the nominations and impending ceremony. There's always the hope that personal favorites will be recognized (this year, it was especially pleasing to see the terrific *American Fiction* and its star Jeffrey Wright acknowledged), and when sitting down to watch the show, the anticipation that this time, the Oscars will get it right. I can still recall the electricity that swept through the room at a 1992 viewing party when it became clear that *The Silence of the Lambs* was going to make history and claim the top five honors.

By that point, of course, the year-old *Silence* had already become a permanent fixture in the pop-culture pantheon; that was clear at the top of the show when host Billy Crystal was wheeled out in restraints and Hannibal Lecter anti-bite mask. Even if it hadn't taken the trophies, the film would still stand as one of the genre's all-time greats. That huge Oscars victory helped gild the film's rep, certainly, though neither *The Exorcist* nor *Jaws*, to name just two of the few horror movies to be in contention for Best Picture, needed a win

in that category to secure a place in the hall of fame. *Silence*'s triumph, in fact, was an exception that proved a rule: Fear fare, in general, tends to be overlooked by the Academy. There have been dozens of articles about scary movies and, especially, performances in them that have been worthy of the honor and were ignored in favor of "safer," straight dramatic choices.

(Sidebar: While it's absolutely true that Greta Gerwig and Margot Robbie should have been nominated for directing and starring in *Barbie*, it's also true that the eight nominations the movie did receive, including Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay, were a significant achievement given that the Academy also tends to shun comedies and big, populist hits, and those responsible for them. Yes, front-runner *Oppenheimer* was a box-office smash as well, but it feels like the Academy was waiting for Christopher Nolan to move "beyond" superhero movies and start doing serious stuff before giving him a Best Director nod for *Dunkirk* and now that film. And it's worth pointing out that the number one box-office success of 2022, *Top Gun: Maverick*, also got nods for Best Picture and Best Screenplay while its director and star didn't make the cut.)

That's one reason the *Godzilla Minus One* nomination was so thrilling: A monster movie, a genre the Academy doesn't often acknowledge, got a little Oscar love. Especially because there was an unfortunate omission in a related category for another new take on a classic creature. Not to beat a dead horse, as I addressed the unfortunate attention given the film's box-office non-performance a couple of Exordiums ago, but the excellent prosthetic work by Göran Lundström et al. on *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* made it to the shortlist for Best Makeup and Hairstyling, but not the final five. With the arguable exception of Willem Dafoe's scarred visage in *Poor Things*, there were no horrific characters to be found among the nominees, including *Golda*, *Maestro*, *Oppenheimer*, and *Society of the Snow*.

It's reflective of a trend in the category that's been ongoing for a while now. Back when the Best Makeup category was introduced in 1981, the inaugural winner was Rick Baker for *An American Werewolf in London*, and he'd go on to a record-setting six more wins in the category for characters ranging from the Grinch to the titular beast of 2010's *The Wolfman*. Yet you have to look hard for many other horror movie monsters among the Best Makeup winners or even nominees; the last six statuettes, for example, went to *The Whale*, *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Bombshell*, *Vice*, and *Darkest Hour*.

Not to talk down the excellent work on all of these, but dramatic character makeup clearly takes precedence over the more frightening kind in the eyes of the Academy's makeup branch. While it was oft mentioned that Mia Goth shoulda been a contender last year for *Pearl*, how about a nod for Sarah Rubano's superb transformation of the actress into the older Pearl for *X*? The same year, the striking work by various artists on *Crimes of the Future* couldn't get past the shortlist, and Britain's Dan Martin has been repeatedly neglected for his contributions to movies like *Infinity Pool*, *Possessor*, and others; he could have even ridden an Oscar darling to a nom as part of *The Banshees of Inisherin*'s makeup team. Prior to *Demeter*, the only out-and-out horror films to even make the shortlist in the past decade were *Crimes* and 2018's *Suspiria*; to find one that was actually nominated, you have to go back to, well, *The Wolfman*.

Even as I write this, admittedly, there's that part of me saying that in the big picture, a little gold man is just one small part of a movie, actor, or craftperson's validation. But that's part of what gives the Oscars their intrigue: You can say and believe they don't matter, even as the choices of who does and does not receive them inspire passionate debate and outrage among cinema buffs.

WITH LAST YEAR'S *GODZILLA MINUS ONE*, THE BIG MAN FINALLY GOT HIS LITTLE HANDS ON AN OSCAR NOM.

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SceneQueen

STATE OF THE SCENE

OUR INDUSTRY INSIDER SHARES HER CONCERNS AND INSIGHTS ABOUT WHERE THE WORLD OF INDIE GENRE FILM STANDS TODAY.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

Readers, I'm worried. I want to keep making independent movies. I want to help new filmmakers find their voice. I am excited every time I read a new script, because *this* could be the one, the movie that changes everything...

But the truth is, it's never been harder for indie genre movies to succeed. COVID, strikes, streaming services underperforming. It's been a tumultuous few years for the industry.

Even when filmmakers find avenues to finance a movie, they often end up selling it for far less than they spent. I'm speaking not only of first-time directors and producers, but people who have been in the game for a while. Is it a case of too many platforms, too much content? There was a streaming boom a few years ago where growth was valued over profit. Many distributors overpaid for films and bought a lot of them. Is there enough audience to watch them all?

So what's the next move for a filmmaker who has independently financed a project and needs to find a home for their movie in an increasingly crowded field? Sell for less and hope for the best? Hold onto that film and sell it later when distributors need more content? Both are risky. Thank God for festivals, which will always play cool movies, regardless of potential distribution, and artists and actors will continue to make their passion projects no matter what the financial future may hold for those films.

Still, for most creatives, it's been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad time to work in the indie film industry. Everyone I know, from directors and writers, from DPs to grips, from makeup to wardrobe, has had trouble finding work since the beginning of the writer's strike almost a year ago. We in the biz are in a sort of holding pattern. How folks are hanging on and paying their bills, I don't know.

The movie-watching public is largely unaware of these problems. There is still plenty to watch, after all! But behind the scenes, it's a very difficult time for creatives and for distributors, who take most of the risk upfront in the hopes of making money down the line. The supply for indie movies is high, and so naturally the price to acquire them will have to go down. Wages for writers and actors is up and so all movies will cost more, and distributors will have no choice but to buy fewer of them and make them less expensively. Is this a sustainable business for indie producers? I think some people will have no choice but to leave the business: actors, producers, writers, crew and beyond.

Do the middlemen (financiers, agents, managers, sales agents, etc) need to be taken out to allow for truly independent productions? Can actors write, direct, do post and sell to a streamer themselves, or self-distribute for similar impact? Some artists I work with, shifting into survivor mode as prospects look bleak, are taking this strategy, and time will tell if it becomes a more common approach in the ever-evolving movie business.

It's a sobering time. Only the heartiest will survive. But it can also be a time when many new artists are discovered. If you can make an indie movie very cheaply and very well, you have a shot to be noticed. More distributors will want to buy less expensive movies, and I think they'll rely on film fests to find great, finished films which do well on the circuit. My friend Landon Zakheim, who programs for Sundance and The Overlook Film Festival, told me they had a record number of submissions for both this year!

And, really, hasn't the artist's life always been hard? Unless you're the star of a long-running TV show, this is a freelance business. Work is never assured. I left acting in my late 30s because the phone stopped ringing and I had two new babies who needed my attention. I never thought I could come back and work as much as I currently have. I had a surprise success with *You're Next*, and then worked my ass off to claw my way back to some sort of relevance.

This work, this creative, storytelling, human condition-illuminating showcase of moving pictures – it's a long game, my friends. If you stick it out in the industry, you'll be able to look back on lean years, busy years, heartache and triumph, failure and victory aplenty.

I want to believe that it's always the right time to be creative. I'm optimistic because I have to be. We will continue to tell stories which are meaningful and daring and insightful and true. We will continue to work with people who inspire and challenge us and make us better humans. Sometimes people will see your work and sometimes they won't. Sometimes you'll make good money on a movie and sometimes you'll make little, or even lose some. You may have more misses than hits. Of all the movies I've been in, there's maybe 25% which people really remember and return to time and again.

This is the spirit of being an artist, carrying on no matter what. I have good films and duds alike. The business is always changing, but like anything, it rewards perseverance. It's up to us to be the torch-bearers in these dark times. Don't give up. Keep going. For the true creative, there is no finish line. 💀

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON KAUZLARICH • PHOTO (TOP RIGHT) BY JOHN MOESES BAUAN

Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

HUMAN.

ALL TOO HUMAN

WHERE THE SUPERNATURAL
MEETS THE SLASHER.

For nearly the full run-time of John Carpenter's *Halloween*, knitting needles and clothes hangers can knock Michael Myers down. His murderous fixation doesn't grant him especially heightened senses. Granted, he's strong enough to lug a headstone up to the second floor of a house, but when he broke into that hardware store downtown, rope was one of the things he stole, wasn't it? Maybe he fashioned a sling or improvised a pulley that allowed him to – out of sight of the camera, as this would be an undignified moment – drag that chunk of granite up those stairs step by painful step.

Until Loomis empties his revolver into Michael at the very end of this night (the end in 1978), Michael doesn't have any special "powers." The reason those bullets seem to work on him is that, finally, he's just a dude who, as Loomis can't get anyone to believe, is evil incarnate. Being evil, and that evil having no explanation, *that's* Michael's special power. It's his drive that fuels him, not anything supernatural.

When he goes falling off that balcony, his chest full of lead, we all breathe a sigh of relief – that revolver was just a bigger knitting needle, a more deadly clothes hanger.

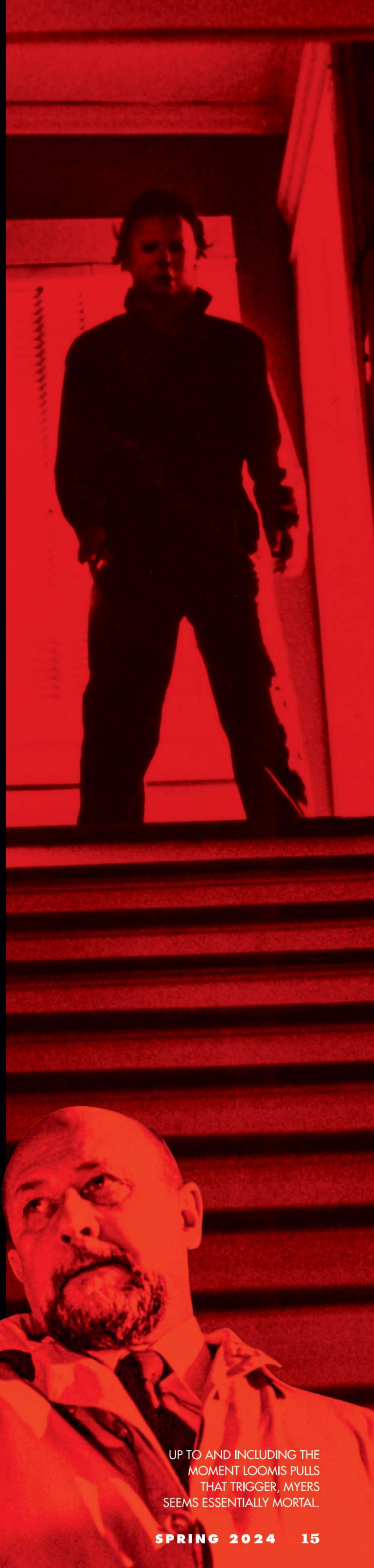
If only the camera wouldn't swoop out to show us that unaccountably empty lawn, right?

But, if it doesn't, if Michael's presence doesn't expand to fill all the empty spaces the final moments of the film shuffles us through, if he hasn't disappeared to do this all again, then… then he stays human and, I submit, maybe the slasher doesn't catalyze into the Golden Age of the eighties. I'm not speaking in terms of box-office success here, either; I mean, yes, if Michael's dead on that lawn from gunshots, then *Halloween* probably doesn't scare the audience so thoroughly that word of mouth and critical acclaim turns the film into a phenomenon, prompting other moviemakers and investors to try to capitalize on that with whatever knock-off they can rush to the screen.

The real magic of Michael's ability to rise after being shot that many times, though, it's that it did what *Black Christmas*, as wonderful and pioneering as it was, didn't manage to get done: it turned the slasher supernatural, and then the film went wide, wide enough to set a pattern for all those who would follow.

Why Michael going supernatural isn't just important, but key, is that this means there can be a sequel, a series, a franchise. I don't mean that the horror audience wasn't already familiar with *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* and *Dawn of the Dead* and *Damien: The Omen II* – by *Halloween*'s release, there'd even been *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, *Jaws II*, and *Look What Happened to Rosemary's Baby*. However, what could be new, what John Carpenter and Debra Hill gifted to the slasher, was this new development of the "monster" put down in the first film coming back *itself*, like Dracula and Frankenstein's monster had been doing for decades.

When that happens, the whole series and burgeoning franchise reorients around that suddenly "main" character – *Michael* became the axis around which everything suddenly spun. The initial backlash to *Halloween III* wasn't because the film's in any way poorly done, it's that the sequel had



UP TO AND INCLUDING THE MOMENT LOOMIS PULLS THAT TRIGGER, MYERS SEEMS ESSENTIALLY MORTAL.

already signaled to us that Michael was the main character, not the season. And, it turns out, slasher franchises need that reoccurring main character. Cycles of violence are all about the bad stuff coming back over and over.

The rest of the industry picked up on this pretty fast, too, that escalating to the supernatural could give a slasher legs, letting it lurch from installment to installment. Take *Friday the 13th*, which starts out very "human," not remotely supernatural – kid-Jason at the end is Alice's dream – but then, as Jason's various injuries and seemingly mortal wounds accumulate, he finally, in the aptly titled sixth installment *Jason Lives*, graduates to definitely supernatural. And then he's off to Manhattan, Hell, space, even Springwood – being supernatural gives you serious legs.

Then, in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Wes Craven dangles the possibility that Freddy's a collective nightmare before showing him to be all-too-real. Freddy graduates from being a boogeyman from folklore to, suddenly, being a supernatural presence. In his dream-world, he's all-powerful – he can activate and dramatize his victims' most secret nightmares. It's enough for him to terrorize Springwood for some six installments, and then even, as every immovable object is lonely without its unstoppable force, go head-to-head with Jason.

Similarly, Chucky of *Child's Play* is supernatural early on, which has made his tiny legs perhaps the longest of all.

What of Ghostface, though, right? What of *Scream*. Why has it never made that mask not a mask, but an actual face, say? Until very recently, *Scream* had legs that seemed to be long enough to carry it far, far into the future, and it was doing this while keeping it all strictly human.

I think the workaround the first installment had that was revolutionary was the legitimate (*Just Before Dawn*...) surprise that one can be two – that it's not just Billy or Stu doing these killings, it's Billy *and* Stu. Then, once we know that gag, it uses a host of workarounds to keep on "faking" the supernatural, doesn't it? Voice-changers in the mask. Body armor. Cell-phone trickery. And then, in the openings of *IV* and *VI*, we're not exactly sure where the floor is in this quickly shifting reality, so we have to grab onto whatever tether it gives us.

No, *Scream* never quite goes supernatural – never say never, right? – but it effectively mimics the supernatural time and again, linking arms with the other major franchises, very much including *Final Destination*, *It Follows*, *Candyman*, all of which do that *Halloween* shuffle, where the supernatural, when it's finally revealed, hits. I don't mean to say the supernatural's the ace in the hole that can save a flagging story, and I also don't want to suggest that it's necessary for the slasher, either. For a franchise to keep moving forward, though, it probably either needs a touch of that "more than human," or it needs to find a way to fake it. 💀

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Don, Dying, and That Damn Doll

CHUCKY creator Don Mancini speaks with his oft-murdered muse about the long, strange journey he's had with his creation.

By Devon Sawa

Photography by Ama Lea

Editor's note: This interview with CHUCKY creator Don Mancini is long overdue, but in a way it feels perfect to do it right now. Since 1988, Mancini has been his murderous creation's friend 'til the end, navigating the character, the franchise, and the horror landscape across seven films and, now, three seasons of TV. (The second half of season three premieres April 10th.)

At the time of this printing, he's also killed actor Devon Sawa three times in the franchise, so we could think of no one better to ask Mancini about his horror origin story, the surprising inspirations behind Chucky's evolution, and his decades-long journey with perhaps the last '80s horror icon standing.

DEVON SAWA: Where did horror first come into your life?

DON MANCINI: Early. I think at age three, with the TV show *Dark Shadows*. I remember waiting for the show to come on at 4 o'clock. It's a soap opera — like *Downton Abbey*, but with vampires and werewolves and witches and ghosts, a whole family saga. The reason I'm pretty sure I was three is because I learned the word shadow from watching the show. I remember asking my mother, 'what is a shadow?' And she told me the literal meaning. She said, 'see this thing on the wall? That's a shadow.'

I took it very literally. I'm thinking if they are calling the show *Dark Shadows* it is meant to be important, so I'm looking for shadows in the show. After watching for a few years, eventually I came to understand the metaphorical meanings.

That was my first exposure and I loved it. I got really into disaster movies when I was 9 years old and 10 years old. Then, when I was 13 or younger, *Jaws*. Later, I saw there was a real connection between the horror genre and disaster genre, with big set pieces about death and destruction, like the *Final Destination* movies.

DS: When you got into film, did you always want to go into horror?

DM: I did, because my interest in pursuing filmmaking at a young age was from these disaster films, like *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno* at 10 or 11, then *Jaws* and *The Omen* and *Carrie*, those last two the first R-rated movies I saw. I also loved a horror TV show called *The Sixth Sense* with Gary Collins. He played a psychic who was a professor at a college, but every week he would get involved in some kind of telepathic or supernatural thing. I loved that. Also, the movie *Dracula A.D. 1972*, which I saw at a pool party.

By the time I was interested in filmmakers — specifically Brian De Palma, with *Carrie* and *The Fury*, plus my love of *The Omen* — I realized they all share something: a fantasy of a teenager who telekinetically punishes their enemies. [*laughs*]

DS: You do dark comedy brilliantly. It never gets goofy; it stays witty.

DM: So many people would disagree with you there!

DS: Where does that voice come from? If someone pisses you off, do you have that Chucky voice in your head?

DM: I've always had a really dark sense of humor. It's in my family. My sisters and I, we all have it, maybe as a coping mechanism or something.

DS: You have a great way of keeping it bottled up.

THE BOYS: DON MANCINI, DEVON SAWA, AND ONE CHARLES LEE RAY.

MAKEUP: ERICA BUNNY ARMENDARIZ | STYLING: BRIDGETT ACUNA | CHUCKY PHOTOS COURTESY OF NBCU

DM: I believe in civics and society. Writing horror movies is constructive in that way. A teacher once told me that being successful as a writer is to find something, a character, or a vehicle that can express your voice. Chucky, for better or worse, is that for me. The sardonic and dark way of puncturing innocent mores. When you think of childhood, it comes with all kinds of presumptions, and Chucky is partly about the scary side of childhood.

DS: For athletes and actors, there's getting in the zone, where you just know that you are flowing. Do you get into a zone when writing?

DM: Yes, and when you experience that, it's a real high. It's what you are constantly pursuing.

DS: How do you know when you're in the zone?

DM: It's writing a scene that's really good that sets off a chain reaction of other ideas. It sounds corny, but you get this feeling that you're discovering something. I'll come up with an idea and I can feel my endocrine system flush. It's this feeling like, well, it was obvious. It was obvious that it had to be this way, but you didn't conceive of it that way.

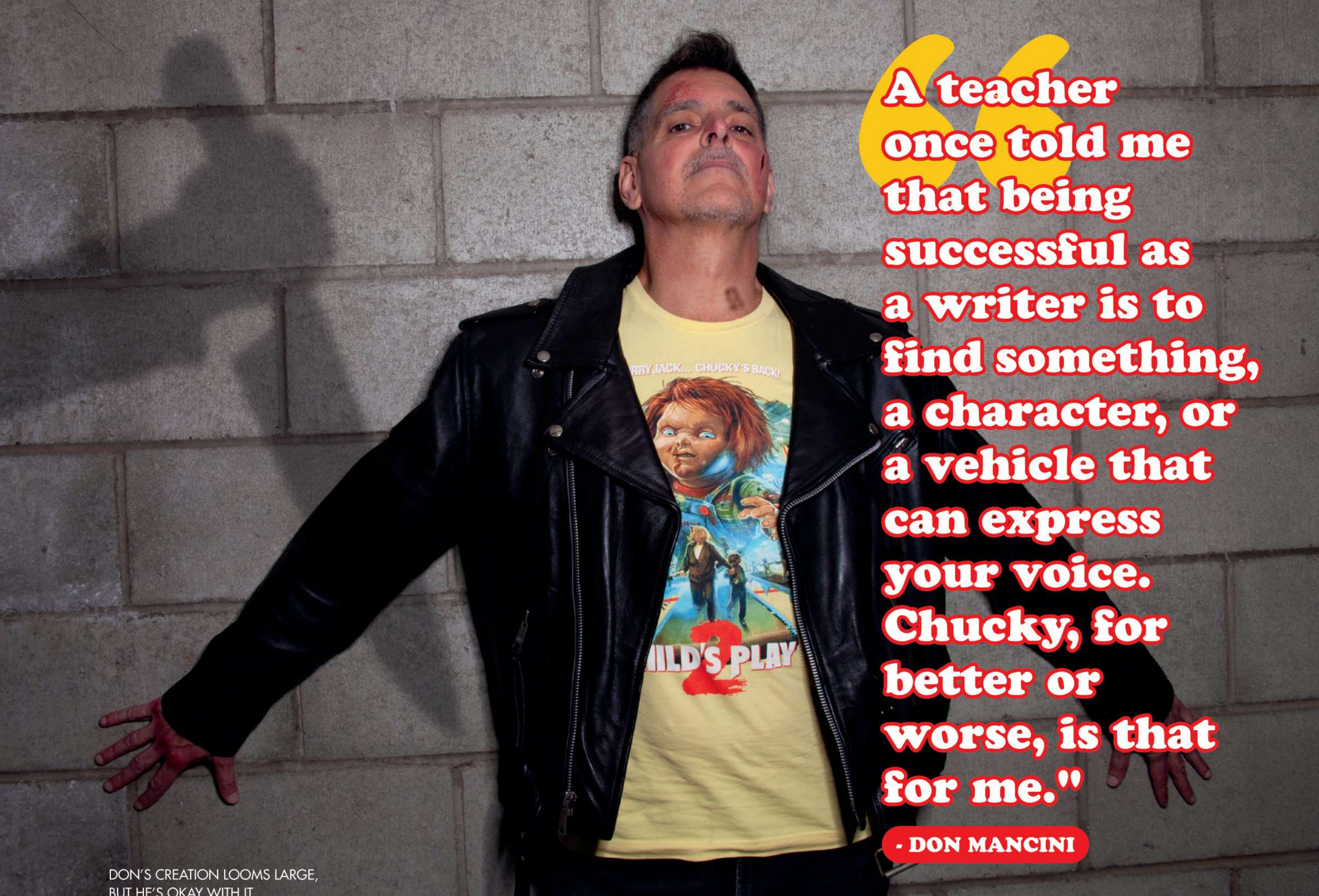
DS: Will you then just keep going and going? Will you go on writing for 18 hours?

DM: People say that. It sounds so dramatic. Have I ever had an 18-hour spree? I don't think so. Though being in television, you do have what feel like 18-hour days.

DS: And what about the opposite?

DM: You mean writer's block? I've been doing this for so long now that — like anyone doing anything — you get smarter about how it works. I've devised strategies when faced with those corners. Making lists is one,

THE AUTHOR REMAINS A NON-FAN OF CHUCKY.



"A teacher once told me that being successful as a writer is to find something, a character, or a vehicle that can express your voice. Chucky, for better or worse, is that for me."

- DON MANCINI

DON'S CREATION LOOMS LARGE, BUT HE'S OKAY WITH IT.

and another is to compulsively write out the story in outline form. If I'm stuck, I love using pen and paper. I'm definitely old enough to cling to those old ways.

DS: I can't learn lines unless it's on paper. I cannot memorize lines off of a laptop or a phone. I have to be holding it to memorize it.

DM: Remember on season one, when COVID was at its peak, when it was all shields and zones, they initially said we couldn't have paper scripts on set?

DS: I remember being upset hearing that.

DM: I remember when we heard that rule in the Zoom, I took my video off and I just curled up into a ball on the couch. I couldn't imagine how we could do this without having physical scripts with us. Luckily that went away instantly.

DS: When did you decide to hire me, and when did you decide to bring me back?

DM: I, of course I saw *Casper*, but all due respect, I wasn't in your demographic then. You really came on my radar with *Idle Hands* and *Final Destination*. Then I was impressed by your auditions for season one. You came in reading for twins who had very different arcs. Not only did you have reads for the scenes, but whole backstories for these guys. And as a writer, you can't help but be impressed by that.

I wouldn't cast you just because you were in *Final Destination*. It was your reads, having different arcs. Same with Fiona [Dourif]. Nepotism did not factor into Fiona being cast in this franchise. The fact that she was Brad's daughter had nothing to do with it other than he said, 'Oh, be sure to see Fiona's audition for *Curse of Chucky*,' and she was awesome.

So, after we all enjoyed working with you so much on season one that I thought 'we should just bring him back.' I've done that with other actors; Michael Therriault was in *Cult of Chucky*. Adam Hurtig and Ali [Tataryn] were both in *Curse* and *Cult*. As I've told you many times, I think we're alike and I identify with your process. It's gotten to the point of 'We should just keep him around. He's a really good actor.' So then it was the priest in Season 2, and this season's drama that we have going on, which I don't want to say too much about.

DS: What's a bucket list project for you in any genre?

DM: I have a few. One of them I got a crack at and it was really disappointing that it didn't move forward. As you know, Devon, I love Brian De Palma and *The Fury*. I love John Farris's original book, which was adapted into the movie. A few years ago, [writer and *Channel Zero* creator] Nick Antosca and I pitched and sold a TV series version of *The Fury* to Fox. Nick very kindly invited me to do this with him because he was meeting with Fox and they mentioned that *The Fury* was something they were interested in developing. And if you spend enough time around me, you'll hear me talk about *The Fury*.

DS: You bought me a T-shirt.

DM: And I blew you up. I blew you up.

DS: Over and over, from multiple angles, just like in *The Fury*!

DM: Another is a Ray Bradbury short story called *Zero Hour*. It takes place in a suburban neighborhood and the kids are playing 'alien invasion' and this girl is home for lunch after being out playing. She starts talking about this character, saying, 'well, he says that the best way of accomplishing the invasion is to have to get allies on the ground.' They recognize kids are a great workforce for manpower and no one will believe them. You read it and you go, 'Oh my God.' You could make a really cool movie about kids assisting an alien invasion.

DS: Who would you give anything to work with?

DM: With this show, I've gotten to indulge that a little bit, working with Joe Pantoliano and Meg Tilly and Gina Gershon, and then this year with Nia Vardalos.

DS: She was awesome.

DM: Kenan Thompson and Sarah Sherman, John Waters again for the second time. The show has really allowed me to work with a lot of people that I am such a fan of. But others? Kristen Wiig would be one.

DS: Interesting.

DM: Martin Short. I like funny people, I guess. You are very funny.

DS: Not intentionally.

DM: No, you were hilarious in *Idle Hands*.

DS: Thank you! That was the last time I looked at work not like work. I was still such a teenager that I had no worries, no bills, no mortgages. I just showed up and goofed around on set all day and did what I loved.

DM: On this show, we had two years of COVID, really three because we had people go down in season three, but for seasons one and two it was masks and shields, the zones and the testing, all of that. Then the strikes. We've often said to one another, 'wow, can you imagine what we could do if we could just do this show under normal circumstances?'

But because of the strength of the team, we were able to pull through. There's just kind of a chemistry that you catch that has got to at least partly be luck. And we're all conscious of that.

TEAM CHUCKY! BACK ROW (L-R): ERIK BECK, STEVE NEWBURN, DON MANCINI, GORD ROBERTSON (IN GREEN), TONY GARDNER; FRONT ROW (L-R): PETER CHEVAKO, PAM IVETA, CHUCKY, PORTIA LYNN.

DS: I've been doing this for a while, and it is rare to get on a show where everybody — the cast, the writers, the crew — want to be there, not just collecting a paycheck, but to actually make something great and amazing.

DM: I have friends who are on shows that are just nightmares. They're like this death march where you go, 'oh my God, we're here for six months stuck in Toronto.'

DS: I do usually prefer movies only because there's a start and a finish. You're gone in a month or two and that's it. For TV, you've got to be really lucky to get on something that by season two or three you are still enjoying. And I think that we made it all this way and we're all still doing fine. Knock on wood!

Of course, I always think that I'm not coming back. That's why I ask all the time, 'Are you sure you want to bring me back? I mean, are you sure I'm coming back?' It's been one of the most flattering things to happen to me. It's been one of the greatest jobs to come back as these different characters, very rewarding artistically. To play those two guys the first year and then completely do a 180 and switch it up and play this antagonist priest that ends up being a good guy in the second year. And then what happens in season three? It's been very rewarding.

DM: My impulse to bring actors back in different roles really comes from the James Bond movies. One of the things I love about that franchise is that they created their own family, bringing back several actors over the years in different roles. I remember, as a kid, being like, 'What? How does that work?' But then it's, 'wait, this is actually really fun.'

Also, I love writing stuff for actors that I know. I really like thinking, 'Oh, what else can I throw his way?' Whether it's you, Devon, or Gil Bellows or Lara Jean Chorostecki (who played the nun last season and she's the First Lady this year). I really like it.

To tailor these roles, like you as the President, and knowing just the way you look, it's like, 'okay, it can be this

PHOTO (BOTTOM LEFT) COURTESY OF TONY GARDNER

kind of JFK kind of figure.' Because I remember you initially were thinking some kind of Clinton figure, for some reason. And I was going, 'No, no, no, you're hot. You have to be the hot president.' Am I allowed to say that? I think maybe I'm not allowed to say that anymore.

DS: I wanted a saxophone and the secretary. I even pitched the accent, didn't I?

DM: You did. You did. I was like, 'Uh. No, you're very JFK.' And your character has a super interesting arc, which has only been barely broached in the first four episodes, so stay tuned, everyone!!

DS: You've reinvented the Chucky idea three times. The first three movies were what they were, then you reinvented it with the next set of movies, and now you've reinvented it with the TV show. And I'm sure that in the future there'll be another sort of reinvention.

DM: Well, it's like the Bond movies! They have done the same thing, and it's something that I've been fascinated with since I was a kid.

So, Roger Moore was my first Bond. That's who I grew up with and loved. Then, getting more interested in the character and reading some of the books and short stories and delving into the older movies, you see the gusto that this franchise has had for 60 years, and they've made so many different kinds of movies.

Those films have gone from spy caper to family comedies to event movies — but also lewd and sexy family movies, somehow? That was a weird thing in the '70s before the Internet, when part of the reason boys go to Bond movies is the hot women! That was in the DNA, but it could still reinvent itself over the decades. I always found that fascinating.

So for me, it's one of the ways I just keep myself interested in this — by changing it up and wanting it to be reinvented. And I think it's one of the reasons it's remained interesting to so many people. 💀

"My impulse to bring actors back in different roles really comes from the James Bond movies."

- DON MANCINI

WHEN A GUY KILLS YOU OFF THREE OR FOUR TIMES, YOU DEVELOP A BOND.

SPEAKING OF BOND AND KILLING… WHO NEEDS A LICENSE?

BRING YOUR DAUGHTER TO THE SLAUGHTER

RADIO SILENCE ON ABIGAIL

BY MACKENZIE BARTLETT

Filmmakers Tyler Gillett and Matt Bettinelli-Olpin are the latest directors to take a stab at the Universal Monsters.

PLIÉ, ARABESQUE, TACKLE & CHOKEHOLD: ALL VITAL TOOLS IN ABIGAIL'S TOOLBOX.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL STUDIOS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BERNARD WALSH

When asked who would win in a fight, Abigail or Dracula, Tyler Gillett is quick to respond: "Abigail, fully. I feel like she's bringing a lot of new tools to that fight that maybe Dracula doesn't have." And he's right: have you ever seen Dracula *en pointe*? I don't think so.

Gillett and Matt Bettinelli-Olpin are the directors collectively known, along with producer Chad Villella, as Radio Silence. Their most recent films include *Ready or Not*, 2022's *Scream*, *Scream VI* and several entries in the *V/H/S* franchise. Gillett and Bettinelli-Olpin took a break from their post-production mad dash to discuss their new film *Abigail* with FANGORIA, on what they describe as their "first chill morning in a minute."

"We're on a no-wiggle-room schedule right now," Bettinelli-Olpin says. "Normally, there's wiggle room." But the filmmakers, who got their start uploading their no-budget shorts on YouTube, are well-equipped to working under unconventional circumstances. "It's weird to have a wait-and-watch marketing campaign roll out," Gillett offers. "It's more fun to have it all happening at the same time." Bettinelli-Olpin adds, "We saw the trailer before we even finished shooting."

Abigail is the latest installment in a line of original stories inspired by the legacy of Universal Monsters. Here, a rag-tag group of criminals (played by Giancarlo Esposito, Melissa Barrera, Kathryn Newton, Dan Stevens, Kevin Durand, Angus Cloud and William Catlett) kidnap a young ballerina, the daughter of a mysterious underworld boss, without having any idea that she's actually a bloodthirsty vampire. "It's *Breakfast Club* plus *Usual Suspects* plus *Lost Boys* plus… *Matilda*," Bettinelli-Olpin says. Put it on the billboard!

Star Alisha Weir (who, yes, recently won over audiences in *Roald Dahl's Matilda The Musical*) is in good company as she joins the ranks of other child vampires in films like *Interview With The Vampire*, *Salem's Lot*, and *Let The Right One In*. The young musical theatre veteran puts her skills to new use as the film's monstrous centerpiece. "She is a hundred out of a hundred on the talent scale," praises Bettinelli-Olpin. "She dances, she sings, she has all of the vulnerability you could want when she isn't a vampire, and all the ferociousness you want when she is. Neither of those things get left behind in her character, which is a fascinating thing to watch unfold."

Though every vampire story picks and chooses its own tropes, the likes of Stephenie Meyer and Anne Rice find common ground on at least one thing: a child vampire is the ultimate taboo. To condemn a child to a life of the undead is one line that most members of the blood-sucking community would never cross, and acts as a sort of moral code to help them cling to their humanity (whatever helps them sleep at… day). "It's a very fun movie," Bettinelli-Olpin assures us, "but there is an underlying sadness that comes with a child vampire who's basically robbed of their adulthood, and forced to live eternity as a child."

Levity and fear are complementary emotions, and balancing them is the true test of any horror comedy worth

"I'M SORRY, YOU'RE *WHOSE* DAUGHTER?"

its salt. *Abigail* joins a lineage of vampire films that walk the line between the two genres, and is in many ways a nod to '80s flicks like *Fright Night* and *The Lost Boys*, which also see unlikely heroes go up against a vampire enemy who is more than meets the eye. "*Lost Boys* was probably the touchstone for us, just because it was the vampire movie that we were raised on and obsessed with as kids," Gillett says. "That movie is terrifying, and fun, and absurd, and silly. That's the experience we love having when we're watching a monster movie, and so we wanted to bring a fresh take on that energy with *Abigail*."

Back to that trailer: if you read the comments on any trailer for a horror movie in the last handful of years, you'll find hordes of verklempt villagers, pitchforks at the ready, bemoaning how they wish they could watch a movie without it being spoiled for them in the trailer. While every YouTube comment is, at its core, an act of screaming into the void, in the case of *Abigail* one has to wonder: who do they think they're dealing with here, exactly? To avoid popping a blood vessel, one must assume it's their first Radio rodeo.

At every turn, it's best to assume that the men behind the curtain are always one step ahead. "One of our favorite things to do is try, in small and big ways, to subvert expectations," Bettinelli-Olpin muses. "We talk about it probably more than anything when we're in the process of making something." Surprising audiences in the realm of familiar IP is no small task, but it's one that Radio Silence are uniquely qualified to tackle, thanks to an impressive track record of twists, genre melds, and big swings. "If you're familiar with our movies, you know we often jam a few genres in, and I think this one might be the most genres that we've done," Bettinelli-Olpin says. "The *most*," Gillett underlines, adding, "What ultimately attracted us to the project was getting to approach [each aspect of a] Ballerina Vampire Heist movie really earnestly… Well, 'earnestly' is the wrong word, but we treat all of those things really seriously. And when they collide, that's where the absurdity and the fun of the movie comes from." The heist movie, the ballet movie and the vampire movie are each equally "confident" in *Abigail*, Gillett says: "and then you see those things mixed together and it's like, whoa, what a weird, fun combination."

Entering the world of the Universal Monsters fresh off the heels of reviving the *Scream* franchise was a big endeavor for the directors, and Gillett admits that it was scary. "You don't want to fuck it up, but you also can't take it so seriously that you find yourself not taking the right risks," he

ABIGAIL GIVES MELISSA BARRERA NEW REASONS TO SCREAM.

says. "With *Scream* it was like, 'Holy shit, is this for real? Are we dreaming? This feels fake,' and it was the same with this," Bettinelli-Olpin adds. "But then you have to let that go, and put our heads together and ask: 'How can we do this in a way that we can be proud of?' At the end of the day, part of that is, well, we have to trust our taste, and what we like, and use that to make something really entertaining. And hopefully that translates, because I think if we try to chase something [else], we fall flat on our faces."

The fact that the ballerina turns out to be a vampire isn't the big twist of *Abigail*; it's a prerequisite that both the audience and the main cast of characters need to come to terms with pretty quickly. The real mystery unfolds when the tables turn, and the kidnappers find themselves trapped against their will. "We're borrowing a little bit from *Scream* language," Gillett says. "The characters are aware that vampire movies exist. Kathryn [Newton]'s character references Anne Rice and *Twilight*. Setting the story in a world where the characters are also aware of the tropes of these movies then allows us to subvert the lore and the tropes in a fun way. The line between the audience and the characters disappears, because they're having the same conversation."

Abigail boasts a star-studded cast of misfit kidnappers who each feel, as Bettinelli-Olpin puts it, "like they're in their own genre." Gillett points out that *Abigail* is Radio Silence's fourth ensemble movie. "I think we just love the idea of designing a weird family of characters. We take that really seriously when we're casting an ensemble. We said it with *Ready or Not*, we said it with the new *Scream* movies, that it feels like we captured lightning in a bottle. I think we can say it again with this one."

Abigail also sees Radio Silence continue their relationship with *Scream*'s Melissa Barrera, in a new spin on her anti-hero extended universe. "We love Melissa," Bettinelli-Olpin says. "This is our third movie with her, and we've had such a good time over the course of basically four straight years of working together. We grow together, and we've learned each other's strengths, weaknesses, and how to help each other." Careful not to spoil the gory details, Bettinelli-Olpin hints at some particularly bloody situations on the *Abigail* set where they found themselves wading into uncharted territory. "There were definitely a few times when Melissa would say, 'Well, we've never done this before,' and we were like, 'Yes.' That's what we should be doing! We should be doing things together as a team that are new for

"We're borrowing a little bit from Scream language. The characters are aware that vampire movies exist. Kathryn [Newton]'s character references Anne Rice and Twilight." - Tyler Gillett

OH, WE *LOVE* A RAGTAG BAND OF MISFITS. FROM LEFT: ANGUS CLOUD, KATHRYN NEWTON, KEVIN DURAND (HOLDING ALISHA WEIR), DAN STEVENS, MELISSA BARRERA AND WILLIAM CATLETT.

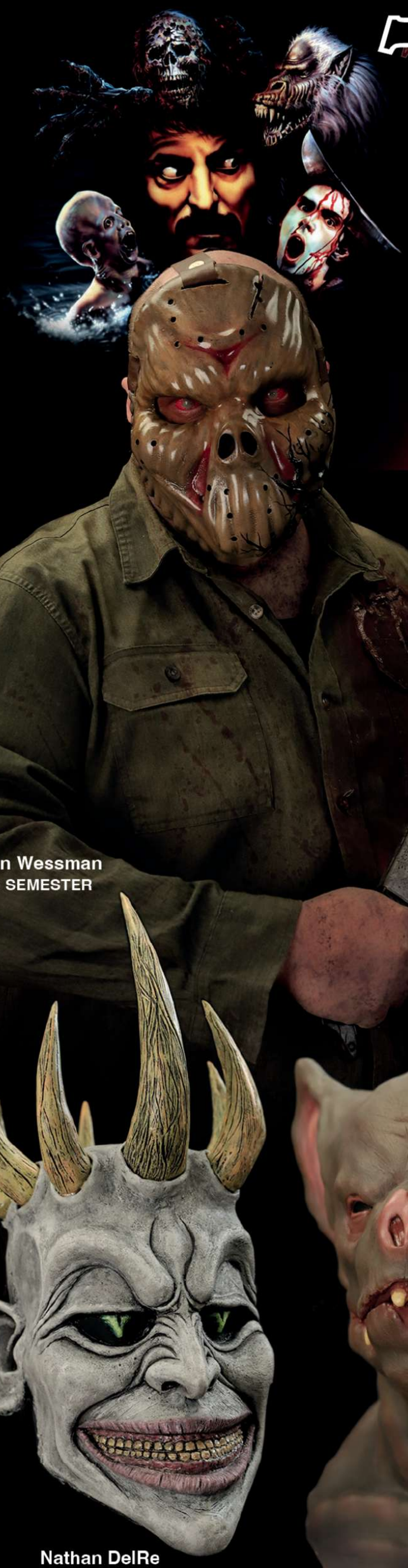
us, that are challenging, that are fun, where we can kind of push our own boundaries a little bit. To get to do that with friends over the course of a few movies is awesome."

There is an undeniable sense that much of that comradery and devil-may-care ethos remain essential to Radio Silence's process, even as their opportunities (and budgets) have broadened. Talking about their early days creating on YouTube as "Chad, Matt & Rob," Bettinelli-Olpin says, "It forced us to not take things too seriously, and also to be persistent... It also really taught us to trust each other." Gillett adds,"We're just making YouTube videos but on a larger level." It's a joke, obviously, but something about it rings true. Cutting their teeth on a public platform like YouTube exposed the duo to a range of invaluable lessons that helped equip them with a zen-like sense of appreciation and impartiality towards both praise and criticism. "In success and failure, you can't take either too seriously. A success and a failure aren't that far apart," Bettinelli-Olpin says. "If somebody says they love it, there's somebody that says it's the worst thing they've ever seen right after that. So you just get really comfortable with it. You get a thick skin. Not in a, 'Fuck it, I don't care way,' but in a 'Cool, we're making movies!' way."

And hot damn, are they making movies! Even as they jump from one cultural behemoth to the next, the pair aren't afraid to scheme about what an original Radio Silence franchise might look like. The potential of expanding their original hit *Ready or Not* "will always be a dream of ours," says Gillett. "In early stages, post the release of *Ready or Not*, we started thinking about how to expand the world of that story. It wasn't our first movie, but it does feel like our origin story in so many ways, both tonally and what that movie means to us." And for both filmmakers, *Abigail* feels like an extension of that dream in its own right. "We've actually talked a lot about how this movie has felt more like making *Ready or Not* in just the originality of it. We never once felt tied to anything else. It felt like we were sort of honoring the opportunity, and we didn't have to honor this old legacy, which was really freeing." Bettinelli-Olpin adds that *Abigail* is "kind of like a spiritual cousin to *Ready Or Not*. It has a lot of similar emotions, even though there's nothing [else] about it that's the same."

It's clear that, whatever's next for Radio Silence, Gillett and Bettinelli-Olpin will be enjoying it every step of the way. "We're not outcome-motivated," says Gillett. "We're process-motivated. We love making stuff, regardless of the outcome. There are a million variables that can affect how something is successful or not successful. The thing for us is, that I think is born of our DIY way of making things, is that we just *love* making things. So the more we can do that, the better. That's the dragon that we're chasing: just to get back on set and fall in love with the process of making something new." 💀

- Matt Bettinelli-Olpin



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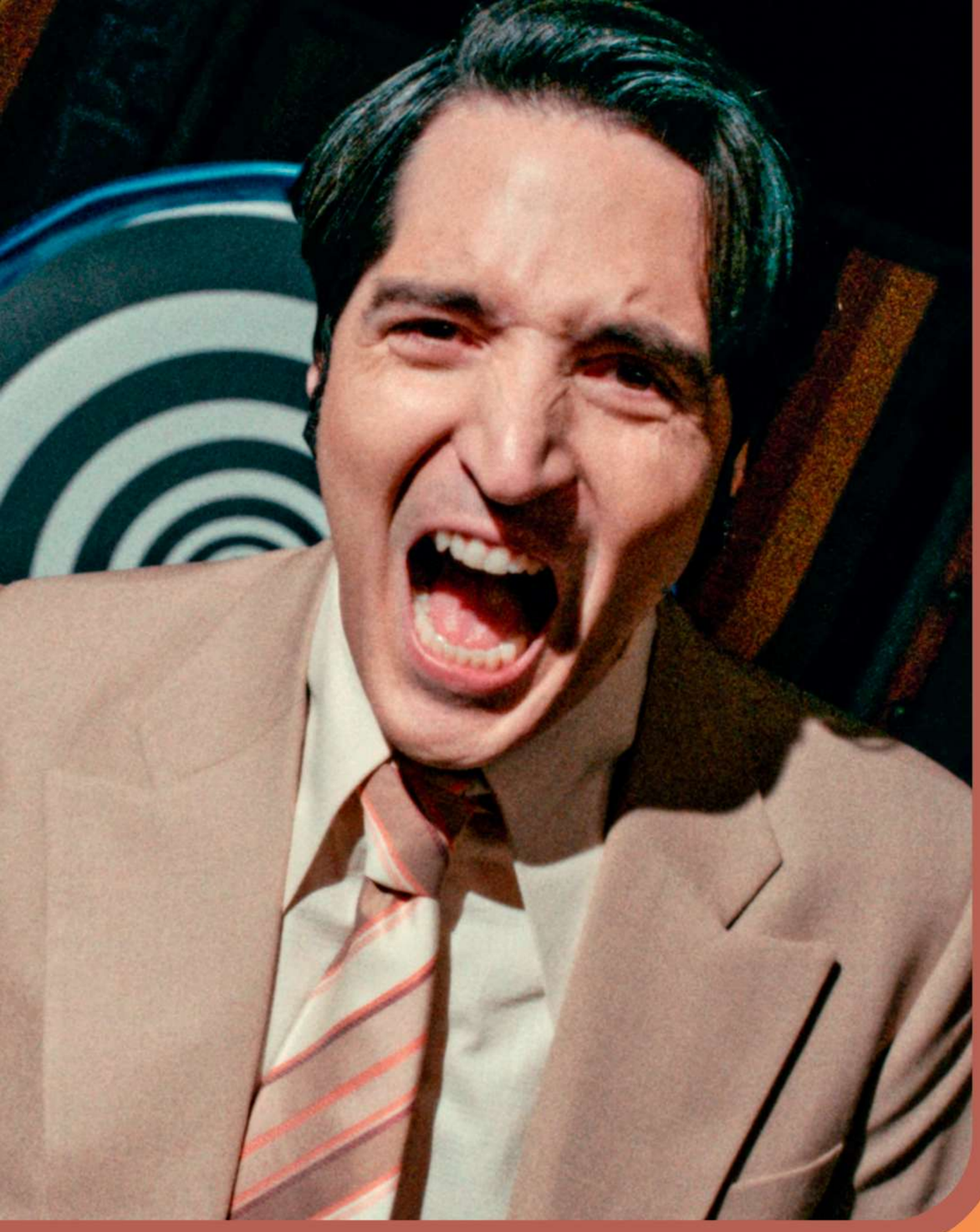


Up Late with David Dastmalchian

By Mike Scollins

Late Night with Seth Meyers' Mike Scollins sits down with *Late Night with the Devil*'s David Dastmalchian to discuss his new movie, formative horror and talk show experiences, and getting blurbed by Stephen King.

Editor's note: When FANGORIA watched Colin and Cameron Cairnes' creepy new possession chiller Late Night with the Devil, *we took one look at David Dastmalchian's role as Jack Delroy, a desperate, floundering late-night talk show entertainer who'd literally sell his soul for ratings glory, and we knew there was only one man who could do the interview:* Late Night with Seth Meyers' *Mike Scollins. Proving our point, Scollins said yes immediately.*

Our first guest is a talented actor you know from such films as *The Suicide Squad*, *Dune* and *Oppenheimer*. His next film, *Late Night with the Devil*, releases in theaters March 22nd. Please welcome our friend, David Dastmalchian!

Hey! [*David's Zoom background immediately starts shooting laser effects.*]

Right out the gate: I hate that this is a print interview, because your screen looks incredible.

Oh man, you have to put that in, please. You have to.

On it.

What if you were that savvy, that a band just started playing me on?

For a hot second I was like, 'Do I wrangle an intern to play my Andy Richter?' but I don't think that counts for class credit.

Old guys would say 'your Ed McMahon.'

How'd I do with the intro, because that's definitely not my job here. I mostly just write Ron DeSantis jokes.

You aced it.

Were those the three movies you would have picked?

That's what the press would generally use but the question is like, 'Am I *known* for those?' But they're definitely the biggest.

I should have considered the demographic. Right now FANGORIA readers are like, '*Boogeyman*! *Last Voyage of the Demeter*!'

I'm like a sniper-esque character actor who's never going to be a celebrity. I just have this weird and wonderful world in which I slither around and get to play these really cool roles but can still get my kids Chipotle. And, occasionally, I'll get someone who comes up to me and asks, 'Are you from *Ant-Man*?'

What do you get recognized for the most?

Definitely my thirty seconds of screen time in *The Dark Knight*.

I introduced you as 'our friend, David Dastmalchian,' which is talk show speak for 'never met.'

Is that true?

Yeah. But maybe this interview goes really well and it won't be a lie. I'll give readers another peek behind the curtain and say that when a host raves about a guest's 'great new movie,' they haven't always seen it. Not the case with *Late Night with Devil*! I've seen it twice and really do think it's great!

Dude! Twice?!

First time I saw it was about a year ago at The Overlook Film Festival in New Orleans.

I had an incredible experience at The Overlook. I got to introduce a Vincent Price movie [*The Tingler*] as my horror host character, Dr. Fearless. And I brought Joe Dante on stage and gave him his horror host name, as well. I christened him Coffin Joe Dante's Inferno. And then got to intro *Late Night with the Devil*.

STAR DAVID DASTMALCHIAN, CENTER, IS JOINED ON *LATE NIGHT*'S SET BY (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) INGRID TORELLI AS LILLY, LAURA GORDON AS JUNE AND IAN BLISS AS CARMICHAEL.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IFC FILMS AND SHUDDER

I first went down in 2019 because I had a small part in a film that was screening, and we had such a good time that it's become an annual weekend. What a great festival.

It's awesome.

Watching *Late Night with the Devil* in a theater with a bunch of horror nerds was a blast. It played like gangbusters.

Especially with your background, I'm sure you were excited to see what we got wrong.

A horror movie about a late-night talk show is basically the center of the Venn diagram of my interests. But the actual premiere was at South By Southwest, right?

Yes. We did South By then Overlook and then the Chicago International Film Festival. All special in their own way. South By was special because it's where the first film I wrote, *Animals*, premiered. It was almost exactly ten years ago, and that movie really changed my life. And then, at Overlook, getting to fully embrace my horror nerddom and be walking around a film festival in my Dr. Fearless persona and hanging out with Joe Dante was rad. And then Chicago was really special because we screened at the movie theater I went to all the time when I lived there, the Music Box. They let me watch from the projection booth.

GORDON AND TORELLI SETTLE IN FOR THEIR SEGMENT.

Do you still get nervous around somebody like Joe Dante?

Absolutely. But I get nervous around most people.

Got it.

There are so many people who have made so many things that have had such huge impacts on me and I've been so lucky that, over the last decade, I continue to find myself in these scenarios where I'm either meeting them or, if I'm really lucky, collaborating with them.

You never want to get to a point where you're jaded or blasé about spending time with Joe Dante.

Yeah! And in fact, we've stayed in touch because that interaction was so wonderful. I had coffee with him and his wife a few months ago at my favorite coffee shop in LA, called Horror Vibes.

I love Horror Vibes!

Whenever I have a meeting, I make people come meet me there. And if they're too cool for Horror Vibes, then I'm not interested.

Yeah, if they're too cool for Horror Vibes, it wasn't going to be a match in the first place.

Exactly. A 'swipe left' if you will.

Is it true that you were cast in this movie based on an article you wrote for FANGORIA?

Very true. I've been collecting FANGORIA for years – as an adult, with pride, but in secret as a kid, because most horror was frowned upon in my very religious household. So I snuck my horror fixes late at night watching *Crematia Mortem*, our local horror show in Kansas. I lost my mother during the pandemic and was thinking a lot about the safe space that these horror hosts provided me; they would bring me in and out of these scary movies that I wanted to watch so badly, but

"THEY DON'T MAKE TALK SHOWS LIKE THEY USED TO" – AND MAYBE THAT'S A GOOD THING.

that also scared me. And then thinking about the few times that I did watch a scary movie with my mom and the connection we had from that. And then Phil Nobile Jr. gave me the opportunity to write about that for fucking FANGORIA Magazine! Talk about surreal, man.

And [*Late Night with the Devil* directors] Colin and Cameron Cairnes down in Australia read that article, and it made them want to pitch me the project. They sent me the script and the deck and, as soon as I opened it, I was hooked.

Do we know if they're reading *this* article? Because, if so: Mike Scollins, 6', willing to shave.

And does great intros, guys!

Who were your horror host faves?

Crematia Mortem, for sure, was my intro. And then I'd watch *USA Up All Night* with Gilbert Gottfried, *Reel Wild Cinema* with Sandra Bernhard and, ultimately, Joe Bob Briggs. When I moved to Chicago, I discovered the magic of Svengoolie. I still watch him every week on MeTV. Elvira was definitely one of my early crushes. The aesthetic for my first feelings of attraction were definitely inspired by Vampira. I still have a soft spot for gothy vampiresses. And the horror hosts didn't just introduce me to movies I love so much, they introduced me to actors and performance styles that are huge inspirations for everything I do. When I was Polka Dot man in *The Suicide Squad* and got to put that makeup on for my first camera test, I got tears in my eyes because I was having my Lon Chaney moment.

Man, that's the best.

It's nuts, isn't it?!

Okay, so we definitely get your horror connection to the script, but was late night television important to you as a kid?

Very.

You deliver a proper monologue in the movie and looked very at home as a talk show host.

The monologue was the scariest part of the whole performance for me. But, as a kid, that was usually all

"Horror hosts didn't just introduce me to movies I love so much, they introduced me to actors and performance styles that are huge inspirations for everything I do."

- David Dastmalchian

I ever got to see before it was time to go to bed. So I'd watch Carson or Letterman or Leno. And then, as the years progressed, I became a very big Conan fan. And I wanted a similar vibe because [my character] Jack Delroy is a consummate talk show host but with an outsider-y, fringe edge to him. There was also a Morton Downey Jr. energy I wanted to elicit. And then a huge ace in my sleeve, which was given to me by Colin and Cameron, was a late-night talk show host I'd never heard of before named Don Lane.

[*Mike nods as if this name means absolutely anything to him.*]

I'm glad I got the thumbs up from you on the monologue. Obviously, most of that credit goes to Colin and Cameron. One cool thing about the way they shot it is they got me an actual, live studio audience.

I imagine a live audience really puts you in the right headspace.

And a live band! I was so lucky. I think that set is so awesome.

Did you work off actual cue cards?

I wanted to! But the cue card guy was just holding up prop writing.

Okay. I'm going to read you an actual tweet from Stephen King. Are you ready?

I'm ready.

'You lost, you miserable, self-entitled, infantile fucker. Concede and get the hell out.' That was from November 8th, 2020.

God, don't you love him? Stephen King has so many fuckin Trump-y fans and just does not give a shit.

I used to think *The Shining* was my favorite thing he'd ever written but now it's this tweet. Okay, I'm going to read you another Stephen King tweet.

Okay.

'*Late Night with the Devil*- I got a screener. It's absolutely brilliant. I couldn't take my eyes off it. Your results may vary, as they say, but I urge you to watch it when you can.'

[*Dave buries his face in his hands.*]

LATE NIGHT WITH THE DEVIL WAS FILMED IN FRONT OF A LIVE STUDIO AUDIENCE, BLESS THEIR HEARTS.

I mean, the pull quote for the DVD is done.

The t-shirt that Dave personally made for himself for Christmas is done, the wallpaper in Dave's guest room is done, my bedsheets and pillow monogramming are done.

Truly no greater stamp of approval for a horror film, right?

Honestly, dude, this a full circle moment cause when I was first told about that tweet I was on set doing the *FANGORIA Chainsaw Awards*. I mean… you get it. You fucking get it. It's nuts.

We'll be right back with more from David Dastmalchian!*

[****I guess go Google a commercial and then come back? I like the ones with Shaq and The General. Or maybe check out Horror Vibes coffee.***]

We're back with David Dastmalchian! Is late night television today better or worse than it was in the '70s?

Late night television is better today. There are so many problematic things about '70s late night… '80s late night… '90s late night…

2000s late night…

I think it's a space now where anybody can tune in. It's evolved so much.

Which talk show segment would you least want to participate in: Day Drinking with Seth Meyers, Carpool Karaoke with James Corden or having a conversation with Bill Maher?

As a sober person, Day Drinking with Seth would be really detrimental to my mental health, but trying to have a conversation with Bill Maher would be worse.

Right answer. Horror comedies are tough – what are some of your favorites?

The Black Cat is excellent. *The Abominable Doctor Phibes* is great. *Freaky* really sung for me.

Oh, *Freaky* fucking crushes as a horror comedy.

And a modern masterpiece to me is *Shaun of the Dead*. It's so funny and, at times, gory as shit and scary. Stuart Gordon's films; I think of *Re-Animator* as a burlesque comedy.

When are we getting a Count Crowley movie?

I think it would make a great television series. I originally conceived of the idea in serialized fashion because I wanted the journey to be one that could continue on to many points and create a world in which those points didn't necessarily have to be the finale. Which is why it's such a joy to write as a comic. I would love to see some badass, powerhouse actor bring Jerri to life and then, of course, I get to come in and play one of the vampires. It's crazy; I've been in a lot of horror but never get to play the bad guy.

Give me your Talk Show Host Mount Rushmore and your Horror Villain Mount Rushmore.

For talk show hosts it's Letterman, Conan, Don Lane and, because you're writing the article, Jimmy Kimmel.

[*Mike, once again, nods like he has any idea who Don Lane is.*]

What about horror villain?

Leatherface, Christopher Lee's Dracula, Oliver Reed's werewolf and Lon Chaney's Phantom.

Finally, what villain would make the best talk show host? This is not an opinion question. There's a correct answer.

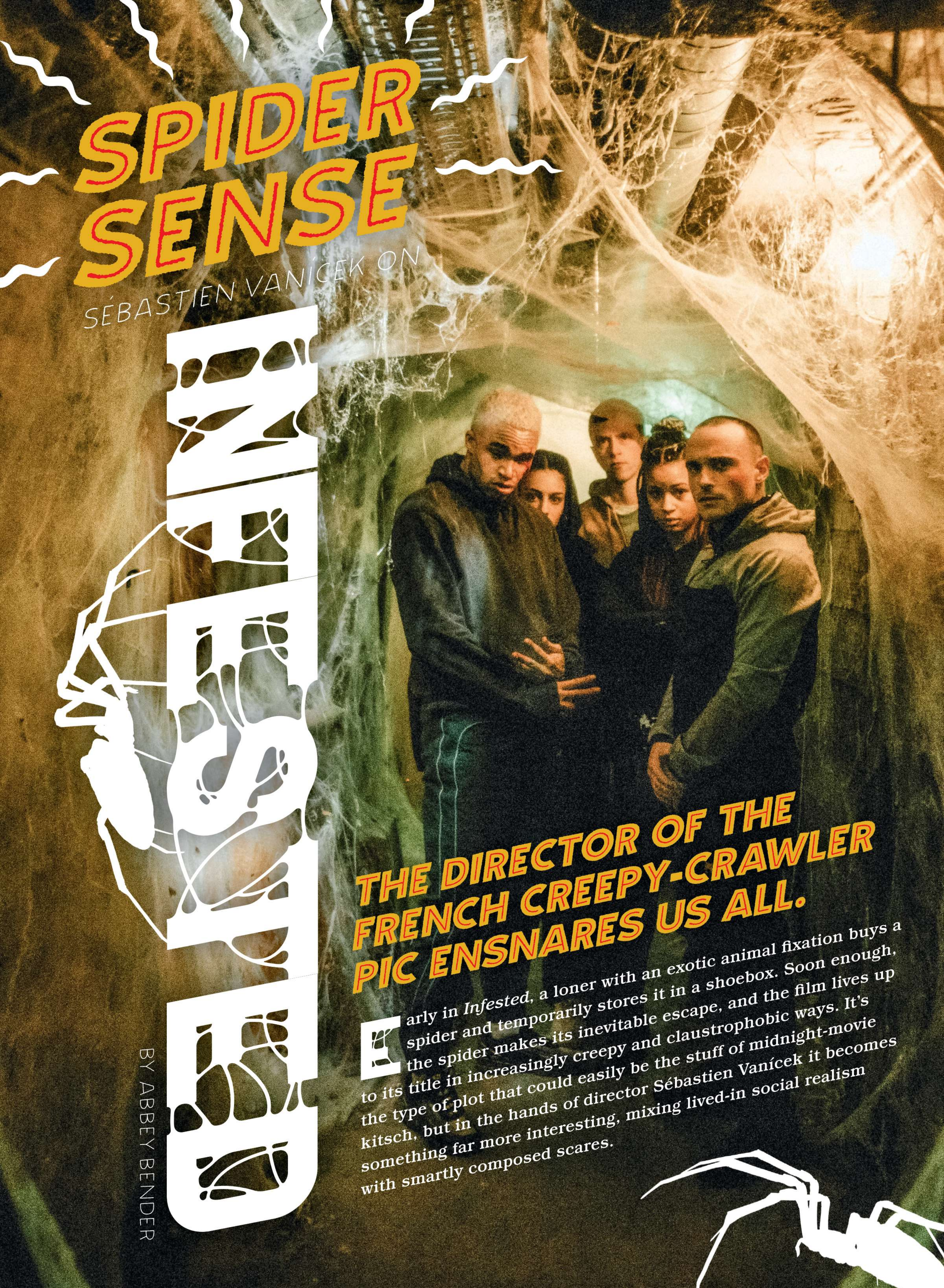
Freddy.

That's exactly right. David Dastmalchian, ladies and gentlemen! *Late Night with the Devil* is in theaters March 22nd! We'll be right back with music from Blues Traveler. 💀

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.

SPIDER SENSE

SÉBASTIEN VANÍCEK ON



THE DIRECTOR OF THE FRENCH CREEPY-CRAWLER PIC ENSNARES US ALL.

BY ABBEY BENDER

Early in *Infested*, a loner with an exotic animal fixation buys a spider and temporarily stores it in a shoebox. Soon enough, the spider makes its inevitable escape, and the film lives up to its title in increasingly creepy and claustrophobic ways. It's the type of plot that could easily be the stuff of midnight-movie kitsch, but in the hands of director Sébastien Vanícek it becomes something far more interesting, mixing lived-in social realism with smartly composed scares.

MANON (LISA NYARKO) BROUGHT A LIGHTER TO A SPIDER FIGHT, AND I'M JUST NOT SURE THAT'S GOING TO HELP.

Vanícek's feature debut is surprisingly personal. Set in a dreary apartment building in the low-income suburbs of France, the film shows a side of the country that is largely unfamiliar to American audiences. For residents on the outskirts, "There's a kind of xenophobia," Vanícek says. "You are always judged by what you look like, how you talk." He knew from the beginning that he not only wanted to set the movie in the suburbs, but to capture his experience of judgement with a potent metaphor: "I wanted to talk about how people in these suburban areas are treated and are seen, and the best way to talk about it was with spiders." He explains, "Spiders are treated the same. When you see one in your living room, you want it out, and in Paris, when they see people from these areas, they want them out."

The characters in *Infested* are already dealing with social and financial issues before the spiders come into the picture, and Vanícek was wary of the often-cartoonish characterization of these creatures. "I wanted to have a realistic point of view on the spiders," he says. "When you see a spider, it's always a B-movie, and I wanted to get away from that." The spiders may be scary (especially when they start growing and multiplying to an extreme degree), but "they are still animals who react," says Vanícek, and even as they evolve, they're grounded in a gritty world – which may make them even more unsettling.

Prior to *Infested*, Vanícek, a self-taught filmmaker, spent a decade making short films and working in a supermarket. While his feature debut is his largest-scale project yet, it's still low budget, which raises a major question: How was he able to make all those spiders look so convincing? While many creature features these days rely on CGI, Vanícek was adamant about using real spiders as much as possible. "We used real spiders for about 50% of the movie," he says. That's right: Many of the spiders you see in *Infested* are alive. "Obviously it's cheaper," he notes, but he also found that the tactility of real spiders helped him develop the aesthetic, since he could set up lighting and camera movements around them. Using real spiders on the shoot may sound like its very own horror movie behind the scenes, but Vanícek had close conversations with the film's animal wranglers and concluded, "As soon as they told me that the spiders would be well-treated, and wouldn't be in danger, I told the crew, 'We definitely will shoot with spiders because it's really cool to have real things on the set.'"

Of course, there were some key scenes where special effects were necessary, as the spiders become increasingly monstrous, but Vanícek sought to use these effects sparingly and keep the real-life spiders the stars of the show. "We based all our VFX on the real spiders," he explains. "As soon as we had really interesting things with real spiders, I told the VFX team that their designs had to move like the real spiders and have the same shape and

MORE LIGHTERS! DO THEY KNOW SOMETHING WE DON'T KNOW?

the same reactions." Working with real spiders also brought a layer of empathy to the film both onscreen and off: "It's always important to talk about animal protection," says Vanícek. "The spiders were treated like children." Onscreen, the protagonist, Kaleb (Théo Christine), treats his critters like his own children, and it's apparent that he relates more to the animals than he does the people around him. "The film talks about animal protection and how humans treat animals, and it's important for me that people know that what I say in the film I do in real life," says Vanícek. The spider infestation isn't exactly a shock, and before Kaleb even buys the spider, we see its destructive potential as it bites someone in the desert, before ending up in France. However, knowing of Kaleb's attachment to the animal (he even names it Rihanna!) gives the infestation a strange touch of pathos that's missing from the average arachnophobia thriller.

Similarly, Kaleb, his sister, and their friends aren't the typical Instagram-ready personalities who increasingly dominate mainstream genre movies. Vanícek established a rapport with his band of young actors, saying, "We are from the same generation, so we speak the same language. They were ready to give everything that they had, and I gave them a lot of freedom." Rather than having each character be an archetype, he wanted to be sure "there's a big part of each actor in their characters." With this sense of realism, it's tricky to predict any of their fates, and when you see the spiders getting closer to them, the stakes feel heightened.

The majority of the action in *Infested* is confined to Kaleb's housing project. "It was important for the building to become a character, to become something that is alive," says Vanícek, and while the building's interiors are frequently intentionally drab, as the scares are heightened, so too are the colors and camera movements. There are lurid splashes of purple and green light and in one particularly memorable moment, the shot spins around like a spider-filled kaleidoscope. Vanícek went for a disorienting effect, using metallic, industrial sounds and filling already ominous-looking rooms with spiderwebs. "It's like a ship that is sinking, because all the building is sinking," he explains, adding that while he mostly avoided inspirations from classic horror movies, he took a cue from the atmospheric interplay of light and darkness in *Alien*. He also tried to have a spider's-eye view when filming. "I wanted to have two types of *mise en scène*, one for the spiders and one for the humans," he says. Giving the spiders their own type of *mise en scène* has the dual effect of making them feel scarier and more relatable simultaneously. At times, they seem so close we can almost feel them, but this closeness also allows us to see them as individual creatures, rather than just a mass, and come face to face with both our fears and Kaleb's fixations.

Ultimately, all of Vanícek's creative choices — from setting the film in the suburbs of France to using real spiders as much as possible to setting up different types of shots for the spiders and the humans — were in service of a specific message. "The statement of *Infested* is like, 'Let people and living creatures out of their boxes,'" Vanícek says emphatically. Whether there's an exotic spider in a shoebox or a person in a fortress-like apartment complex, *Infested* wants them to break free, no matter the consequences. 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COURTESY OF SHUDDER

KONG

GODZILLA x KONG

THE NEW EMPIRE

HERALDS A NEW MONSTERVERSE

BY BRETT GALLMAN

Escalation has become the expectation with sequels, and nowhere is that mantra more obvious than it is with King Kong and Godzilla, two of cinema's biggest icons. When these titans collided in 2021's *Godzilla vs. Kong*, it wasn't just a long-overdue rematch but also a culmination of the previous MonsterVerse entries. The very definition of an event film, the crossover was a spectacular payoff, albeit one that inspires an obvious question going forward: just where do you go from a film that climaxes with Godzilla and Kong tag-teaming against Mechagodzilla in a showdown its director hailed as "the ultimate Adam Wingard movie" during a previous interview with FANGORIA?

WITH *GODZILLA X KONG*, DIRECTOR ADAM WINGARD IS HOPING TO MEASURE UP TO THE BIG HANDPRINT HE MADE WITH *GODZILLA VS. KONG*.

"I wish I could use that same quote this time!" he says with a laugh after being reminded of that bold declaration. "I feel that's even more true of *Godzilla x Kong*," he adds while tackling the big question of moving this series forward. Luckily, he already had something in mind before the previous film even wrapped. "The idea for this film developed in the post-production for *Godzilla vs. Kong*," he reveals. "I started imagining where I pictured the story going, and the construction of that story stayed consistent." Once his first outing was a success, he was eager to pitch a follow-up that included aspects that eventually came to fruition in the film. "I had the major set pieces already in mind, along with new characters and even some of the imagery, like the big trailer shot with Godzilla and Kong racing towards the camera."

Wingard's desire to return to this universe stemmed from wanting to play in its sandbox some more and further hone his monster movie craft, a notion that was influenced by another filmmaker. "When I was initially inspired to do this film, I was reminded of this interview with Quentin Tarantino, where said he made *The Hateful Eight* after *Django Unchained* because he had learned the specific attributes you need for a Western, and he wanted to put them to use on another movie," Wingard recalls. "I really related to that after doing my own monster movie. I had learned all these things that you can only know from having made one. I wanted to take that energy and put it into another film, where I can do something bigger and bolder."

Part of this bigger, bolder vision involves further cementing the monsters as protagonists. "One of the biggest lessons was building confidence in terms of what the monsters can do to hold up the movie," he says. "I learned from those sequences where we went away from the humans altogether and let Kong guide the story." *Godzilla x Kong* indulges this approach on an even grander scale, as Wingard frequently describes a film that's carried by its title characters, fulfilling a lifelong fantasy. "The movie I always wanted to see as a kid was very monster-centric, and I felt like the technology and confidence are

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

WINGARD, LEFT, RECONNECTS WITH *THE GUEST*'S DAN STEVENS (CENTER) AND *GODZILLA VS. KONG*'S REBECCA HALL (RIGHT).

PHOTOS (TOP LEFT & BOTTOM RIGHT) BY DAN MCFADDEN

here," he muses. "Let's allow the monsters to tell their own story, so one of the biggest things that I wanted to accomplish with this film was to lean into nonverbal, visual storytelling because there's no other type of movie that you could convince a major studio to make at this scale and budget where you go so long without dialogue and let the visuals guide the story."

Wingard admits to some trepidation — and perhaps even some subterfuge — when hatching this unconventional approach, because *Godzilla x Kong* isn't just set to be a bigger, bolder riff on its predecessor; it's going to be weirder and wilder, too. He describes an early conversation with co-writers Terry Rossio and Simon Barrett that established his idiosyncratic vision for this monster mash: "I told them something I didn't ever want to repeat to the studio because it would have scared them," he offers. "The movie that we're making is an experimental film that's driven from the point of view of the monsters, and there's going to be large sections of the movie with no dialogue."

The film's premise — which finds monstrous newcomer Skar King challenging Kong's Alpha Titan throne — also encouraged Wingard to indulge his wildest imagination for this universe. Like previous Kong filmmakers, he's drawn to the evocative creatures and mythology that originated on Skull Island before migrating to the Hollow Earth, a setting that encourages even more of that kid-in-a-sandbox mentality. "It's the Prehistoric era preserved within the earth, so everything's bigger, more dangerous," he says. "What's cool about Hollow Earth is it's almost like being able to take the audience to another planet, and it's even trippier because the physics are different down there."

Wingard also promises that *Godzilla x Kong* dives deeper into this realm, both in terms of its inhabitants and its mythology. "In the last film, we were just taking a little pleasure cruise through Hollow Earth that revealed little portions," he says. "We really get to dig in and explore the different environments and mysteries that lie within this time." Hollow Earth's unique environment also provided an opportunity to experiment with the film's physics and fight choreography. "That was something that I wanted to play with. In a lot of ways, I was inspired by the action in *The Matrix*," he explains. "It was so innovative the way it utilized physics, and that played a part in conceptualizing some of the set pieces and action set pieces in Hollow Earth," a description that conjures up visions of unreal Kaiju carnage that bend the laws of nature. To borrow a famous phrase from The Wachowskis' seminal cyberpunk shoot-em-up: "Whoa."

For further evidence of Wingard's bold, experimental approach, consider that *The Matrix* is one of many eclectic influences on *Godzilla x Kong*. Where the previous film evoked comparisons to '80s action staples like *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon*, Wingard trawled the deeper recesses of his formative cinematic experiences for the follow-up. "I was inspired by Robert Aldrich's *Emperor of the North*, starring Lee Marvin and Ernest Borgnine, who have a famous battle scene involving a chain and

BIG BAD SKAR KING SHOWS OFF HIS PEARLY WHITES.

an ax," he raves. "That was one of the biggest inspirations I had with Godzilla and Skar King: I wanted to capture how insane the feeling of watching that action scene was for the first time." He then pivots in a different direction by citing *Apocalypto* as another influence on the film's action sequences. "I liked the chase elements of that film, and that was on my mind quite a bit in terms of Kong's storyline," he explains.

One influence, however, has remained constant throughout *Godzilla vs. Kong* and this sequel: professional wrestling, an obsession that Wingard says has been reignited by Jason Eisener's *Dark Side of the Ring*. "It's gotten me back into wrestling even more than I was when I was a kid," he gushes. "So there's a lot of that pro wrestling energy within my depiction of the monsters fighting — I want that absurd power that goes along with that." He adds that some character designs took inspiration from this world, most notably Kong himself. "When we evolved his look from *Skull Island*, we gave him much more of a pro wrestler kind of build — he's 'roided out with a lot of upper body strength." He also promises that eagle-eyed fans of the squared circle should delight in the choreography. "We managed to get a couple more obvious wrestling moves in this movie," he raves before providing a tease: "There's one impressive move in particular that I don't want to give away."

"THERE'S A LOT OF THAT PRO WRESTLING ENERGY WITHIN MY DEPICTION OF THE MONSTERS FIGHTING — I WANT THAT ABSURD POWER THAT GOES ALONG WITH THAT." - Adam Wingard

While much of the marketing for *Godzilla x Kong* centers on the latter titular beast, Wingard assures me that Toho's King of the Monsters is more than well-represented in this sequel. "You see the evolution of Godzilla within this movie. It's a major story point and it's not just a physical evolution but also an evolution of his personality," he offers. "You get to see him doing things and reacting in new ways that are exciting." Being able to put his stamp on Godzilla for this outing was both a major thrill and a departure from the first crossover. "In *Godzilla vs. Kong*, I specifically went out of my way not to change Godzilla's design from King of the Monsters at all because I wanted that continuity," he says. "However, I missed out as a filmmaker being able to put my own touches on Godzilla. And so going into this film, I knew I wanted to do a new approach," resulting in a character design with prominent pink flourishes. While he insists it's a story-driven decision, Wingard is just as quick to admit the aesthetic is a personal preference when he turns his camera around to reveal a set of pink lights illuminating the film's editing room. "These are the lights I have up, and it's like my house; pink is my favorite color!"

Despite Wingard's emphasis on *Godzilla x Kong*'s titan headliners, the human characters aren't lost in the shuffle, as Ilene Andrews (Rebecca Hall), Bernie Hayes (Brian Tyree Henry), and Jia (Kaylee Hottle) return alongside Trapper (Dan Stevens), a newcomer that Wingard heralds as "an eccentric veterinarian for the Titans."

STEVENS MAY BE NEW TO THIS FRANCHISE, BUT HE'S SWINGING IN WITH STYLE.

ADAM WINGARD:
"PINK IS MY FAVORITE COLOR!"

Wingard is especially excited about working with Stevens again in a reunion that's been a long time coming following their collaboration in *The Guest*. "I've been looking for a project to reunite with him ever since, and nothing's lined up. He was almost going to be in *Godzilla vs. Kong*, but he was busy at the time," he explains. "But it worked out because I think he got the more exciting character this time around."

Meanwhile, fans of Henry's quirky conspiracy theorist will be heartened to know he has an even bigger presence here. "We did a lot more Brian this time around, and he and Dan got along really well. They had a great connection between their characters and the whole human storyline in this movie." That human component is something Wingard was "bullish" on maintaining. "I wanted this to be a movie told from the monster's point of view, but it was just as important to make sure that we got the human story right too," he adds. "The key is that it's much more simplified, and the human story mirrors Kong's story. The two main characters of this film are Kong and Jia, who are on these parallel adventures that intersect because they're going through the same thing thematically."

Towards the end of our interview, Wingard reflects on his remarkable career path, which has taken him from helming micro-budget freak-outs in Alabama to the head of the table of one of Hollywood's biggest franchises. While films like *Home Sick* and *Godzilla x Kong* are worlds apart, he maintains his sensibilities have largely remained the same and that this latest crossover represents the culmination of his career. "This new movie represents the whole gamut of my filmmaking," he insists before highlighting one aspect that's sure to thrill the Fango readership. "My earlier films emphasized gory violence, inspired by Lucio Fulci and Takashi Miike films, especially the crazy ones like *Ichi the Killer*," he describes. "And one of the things that I'm proud of is how we managed to incorporate a whole lot of gore in this film. There's some pretty explosive, insanely gory moments and there's clever ways you can get around it since this needs to be a family film."

Wingard appreciates having that kind of latitude in a big-budget production that has to serve a lot of masters and notes that this film felt more personal. "When you walk into a franchise, you feel a little bit like a guest, but with this film, I felt a lot more ownership since a lot of these characters were developed in my movie," he explains. "I was able to take the things I established in the last movie to the next level."

Still, he does express one regret about *Godzilla x Kong*: "I still haven't had the chance to incorporate the Stone Cold Stunner yet," he jokes. There's still hope yet though, as Wingard teases that Steve Austin's iconic finishing move might make an appearance in the future, bringing us full circle and leaving us wondering what a possible third round might hold.

PHOTO BY MORIS PUCCIO • ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

The director and star discuss what it means to make a prequel film half a century after Richard Donner's THE OMEN.

In 1976, *Newsweek* declared it "The Year of the Evangelical," after Jimmy Carter popularized born-again Christians. The same year, Republicans passed the Hyde Amendment, their first significant anti-abortion legislature against 1973's monumental *Roe v. Wade*, barring the usage of federal funds for abortions. In 1976, amidst these swirling harbingers, these deeds and deals of birth and death, progress and control, the antichrist was born onto movie screens.

Almost 50 years after Richard Donner's *The Omen* tapped into the fears surrounding the unholy union of politics and religion, a new perspective emerges. *The Omen*, which spawned three sequels, a 2006 remake and a TV series, is going back before it all started with the prequel, *The First Omen*. The film is centered on a young American woman, Margaret, sent to join a convent in Rome where she uncovers a terrifying conspiracy to bring evil incarnate into the world. Ahead of release, FANGORIA spoke to *The First Omen*'s director and co-writer, Arkasha Stevenson, and star, Nell Tiger Free, surely the most good-natured creatives to put their stamp on the *Omen*'s world-ending mythos.

NELL TIGER FREE PLAYS MARGARET, A DEVOUT YOUNG WOMAN WHOSE FAITH IS SERIOUSLY TESTED.

The First Omen is Stevenson's feature debut, though she's had years of experience in the world of the supernatural as a director of *Channel Zero: Butcher's Block*, and episodes of *Legion* and *Brand New Cherry Flavor*. When Stevenson read the original script, by Ben Jacoby, she was immediately drawn to it. "It wasn't trying to mimic the original, or simply continue to draw blood from it. It existed in conversation with the '76 film." The script offered her the chance to explore the impending arrival of the antichrist through her love of body horror and approach to the genre through a "feminine filter."

Cinematographer Aaron Morton, an increasingly popular DP in the world of horror thanks to his work on *Evil Dead* (2013), *No One Will Save You* and the upcoming *Abigail*, proved instrumental in bringing Stevenson's vision to life. "We're both big fans of [director] Alan J. Pakula, so we looked at a lot of his early '70s collaborations with [cinematographer] Gordon Willis, specifically *Klute* and *The Parallax View*," Stevenson says. "What was important to us was creating the feeling of the '70s beyond costuming, hair, and props. We tried as much as possible not to use a lot of modern techniques. We embraced long lenses and based our look on the Eastman Kodak stock a lot of films in the early '70s were filmed on, like *The Godfather*, *Jaws*, and *Chinatown*."

And of course, there was also the horror… the horror.

Stevenson's mother introduced her to *The Exorcist*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *The Omen* before she even understood she was watching horror. "To me, it was just life, and people dealing with everything that consisted of." This unique introduction to the genre led to Stevenson's fascination with surrealism meeting realism, and our collective cultural fears. She credits Jordan Peele's explanation of the "social thriller" during a 2017 interview with NPR's Terry Gross, in which he said the individual can be a reflection of societal fears, as being the best summation of her approach to horror.

Free is no stranger to horror, having starred as the mysterious nanny, Leanne, in M. Night Shyamalan's series *Servant*. "Apparently, I'm destined to be around creepy babies and creepy children, and I'm happy with it. I was a creepy child, so it's a legacy." When asked about her favorite horror movies she lights up, saying, "The original *IT* with Tim Curry is one of my all-time

IT'S IMPORTANT TO TAKE A BREAK DURING FILMING FOR A GOOD STRETCH.

PHOTO (BOTTOM) BY MORIS PUCCIO

DIRECTOR ARKASHA STEVENSON (LEFT) DIGS DEEP, LIKE CATACOMBS DEEP, WITH FREE.

favorite films, full-stop. I watched it in twenty-five parts on YouTube. I think the first really intense horror film I saw was *Silent Hill*, and I remember just being traumatized after, but in a way where I sought out to be traumatized again. I just watched *Terrifier* and I think it's genuinely altered my brain chemistry. It changed, fundamentally, who I am."

And, of course, *The Omen*. "I think *The Omen* is the jewel in the crown of horror." You may think that's simply good promotion, but Free knows her stuff, referencing characters and sequels, and telling me of semi-regular sightseeing treks to the All Saints Church where Father Brennan famously met his end on a lightning rod. "*The Omen* is just a part of my life, even before this film."

Free describes Margaret as someone who is "devout in her faith and sees the best in people and looks at the world with hope and excitement. At the same time, she's a very tortured, troubled young woman with a very troubled past and maybe too trusting." Stevenson adds, "There hasn't been a lot of exposure to the outside world. She's grown up in an orphanage and in a way where a lot of shame has been attributed to the female body." As important as it was to put Margaret through the wringer, they didn't want to simply depict her as a woman being tortured and objectified for the sake of shock value.

A central theme of *The Omen* franchise is individuals being told they're meant to be something, and struggling to fulfill that role. Stevenson was keenly aware of how the fulfillment of expected roles relates to current events. "It's all about a woman's power to give birth. This is considered a hugely sacred power in terms of religion and politics, and how the world will manipulate a woman's mind in order to take advantage of her body, to harness that ability to create. We pitched our version of the story around the time of the Texas six-week [abortion] ban, and that allowed us to tap into that fear of what's happening to us and our bodies, what could happen, and what has already happened."

Tapping into that collective fear was an important approach, but Stevenson notes that horror should also be fun. "The beautiful thing about horror is that it's everywhere and it's everything and there's so much opportunity to explore every aspect of humanity," a mature, but consistent reflection of her childhood sentiment on horror movies, "It was just life."

When asked about working with Stevenson, Free says, "I'll do anything she'd ever want. She is without a doubt the most incredible person I think I've ever had the privilege to work with. She's so smart and she sees things so clearly. She'll come over to me and we'll have a conversation 90% through hand gestures."

Stevenson shared a similar admiration for Free. "I trusted her so much and leaned on her so much. It was a very special collaboration because Nell is not afraid of anything. She's not afraid to be downright wild and unhinged, which can be a really frightening headspace to be in. She's in every day of shooting and it's a very physical and emotional performance and she was 110% there."

As for what the pair are looking forward to most about *The First Omen*'s release, Stevenson says, "We took a lot of really big swings that I'm really proud of." Free notes that so far, based on the internet comments her mom sends her, no one has managed to guess the direction the film takes, but she's having fun reading theories. "There's definitely some pretty shocking moments I would love to be a fly on the wall for everybody's reactions to," Free says. *The First Omen* is a consideration of women's bodily autonomy and the fear of losing that, and a welcome new lens into the horrors of unleashing the antichrist on the world. This time, Damien, it isn't *all* for you. 💀

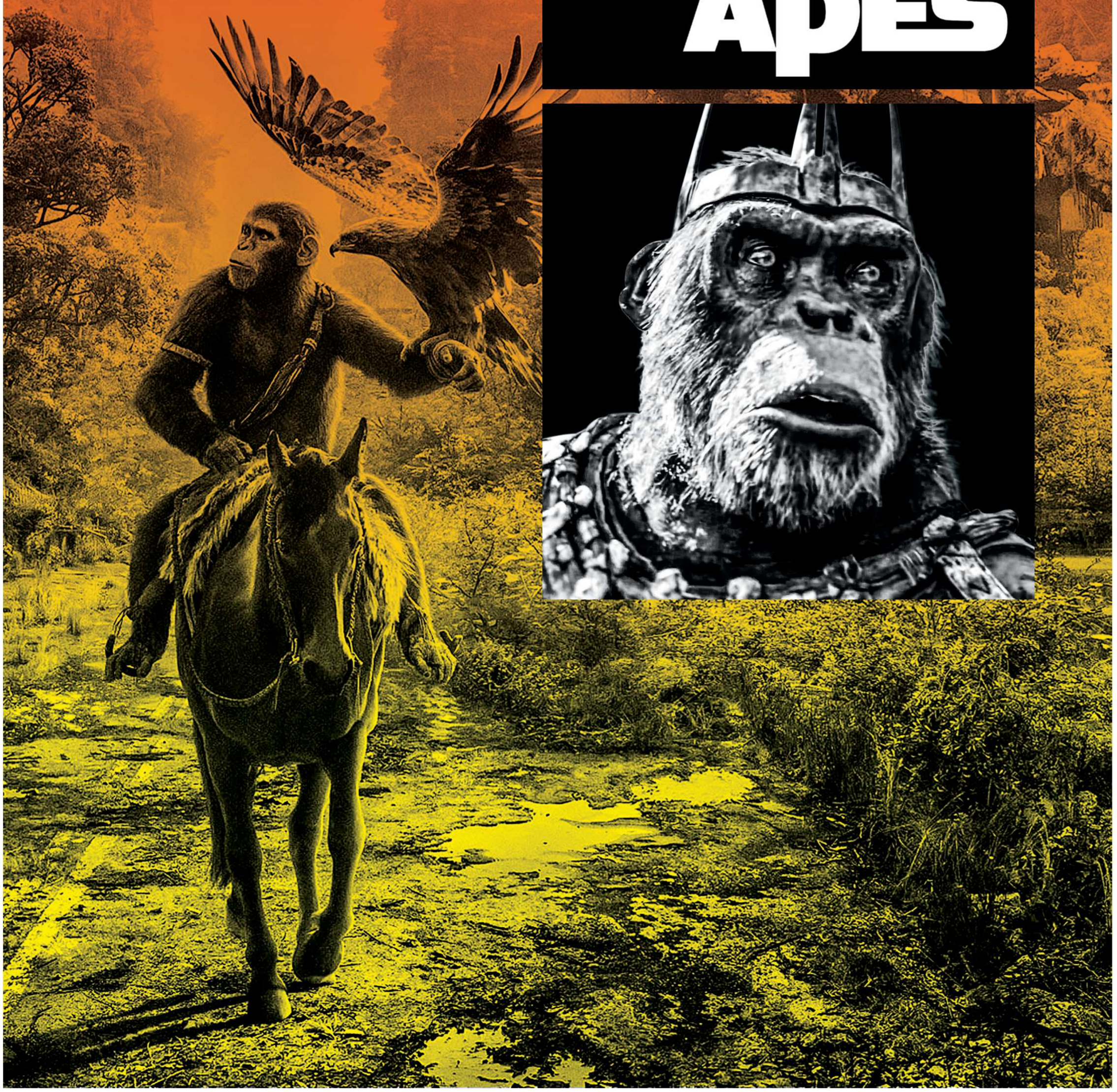
TALK ABOUT FIRE AND BRIMSTONE.

PHOTO (TOP) BY ALFREDO FALVO

KEVIN DURAND GREW UP MARVELING AT *PLANET OF THE APES'* MAKEUP FX. OWEN TEAGUE'S EARLIEST MOVIE MEMORIES INVOLVE ANDY SERKIS' GROUNDBREAKING MOTION CAPTURE WORK. NOW, THE TWO SIMIAN LEADS OF THE FRANCHISE'S LATEST ENTRY DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES AND FREEDOM OF MOCAP, AND THE JOYS OF GOING APE.

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

RULING THE KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES



THINK A *PLANET OF THE APES* MOVIE DOESN'T BELONG IN A HORROR MAGAZINE? DON'T TELL THAT TO ACTOR KEVIN DURAND, WHO PLAYS THE TERRIFYING APE VILLAIN PROXIMUS CAESAR IN 20TH CENTURY'S *KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES*, AND WHOSE EARLIEST MEMORIES OF THE FRANCHISE ARE BEING SCARED OUT OF HIS MIND BY THE TALKING PRIMATES ON HIS TELEVISION. "I REMEMBER BEING A KID, BEGGING MY MOM TO LET ME WATCH IT. SHE'D PLAY IT, AND I WOULD JUST START CRYING BECAUSE I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HOW THE HELL THESE APES WERE SPEAKING ENGLISH."

Durand's co-star Owen Teague, who plays chimp protagonist Noa in the new film, finds the original equally unsettling. "Because everything is practical, in a sandy, desert setting, there's something surreal and dirty about it that gets to me in a weird way."

The actors' feelings touch on the franchise's initial appeal: the horrifying, uncanny spark of Pierre Boulle's source novel and retained in the 1968 film, where Charlton Heston's Taylor discovers the "upside down" world where intelligent apes rule, and humans are wild animals hunted for sport. "It just really messed my brain up, and I'd make my mom turn it off… and then I'd beg her to turn it back on," Durand says.

Though the most recent films come down firmly on the side of the apes, what's perhaps most exciting about *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* is the way it looks to restore the vibe of the original, presenting a developing, flawed ape society vulnerable to the all-too human pollutants of power and control. As director Wes Ball shares in the film's production notes, "If the last three movies were the apes in their stone age, now they're entering their bronze age. We're starting to see cultures develop within different clans. We see what has happened to the world that was left behind, what's eroded in the absence of humanity."

In *Kingdom*, humans are once more mute, wild animals, alternately hunted and pitied by the differing ape factions, and the placid promise of paradise set in motion by Caesar looks to be corrupted by Proximus Caesar's lust for absolute rule. In true *Planet of the Apes* fashion, the Ape society in the films is not without parallels to our own world: the Apes live in a post-truth era (something relatable to roughly 51% of the film's audience), and actual knowledge becomes a powerful tool for the ruling class.

Pitted against each other in this battle for the future of Apekind is Teague's Noa, an idealistic young chimp whose eyes are opened by his interactions with the intelligent human Nova (Freya Allan), and by the ruthless ambitions of Durand's Proximus Caesar, who seeks to push ape evolution into its next stage — by any means necessary. According to Ball, "he knows about the world that came before and wants to salvage artifacts from it, to build a kingdom in which

PHOTOS COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

(L-R): NOA (OWEN TEAGUE), ANAYA (VOICED BY TRAVIS JEFFERY) AND SOONA (LYDIA PECKHAM). I CAN'T BE THE ONLY ONE EXCITED THAT THESE APES ARE FINALLY WEARING CLOTHES.

advanced apes have primacy." Durand adds, "He is a highly intelligent, ambitious being that can see into the future, to process that there is a future. Animals usually can't do that. He has this gift that's brought him to where he is by the time you meet him. And the first time he sees that in another ape is when he sees it in Noa."

Adds Teague, "Kevin and I have had many conversations about Noa and Proximus, and that was an early thing that I latched onto: most apes are present tense. Noa is future tense, and Proximus is also future tense. But Noa is extremely curious. That's his driving thing. Even as really intense stuff is happening around him, he's always got this sense of, 'I want to see what that is. I want to figure out how this works. I want to understand this thing.'"

His fear of the cinematic simians aside, Durand has been prepping for this role since childhood. "I've been doing my ape run since I was a kid, and I made that part of my audition," he says. "I placed the camera at the end of a dark hallway in my house and you couldn't see that I was at the end of the hallway and I just did this scary ape run up to the camera." His imposing size didn't hurt his audition, either. "(Before *Kingdom*), I was supposed to play Hulk Hogan in this film that didn't happen. I was around 295 pounds; I was gigantic. And I was just like, 'Yeah, I'm the king of the goddamn apes. You should probably give me the job.'" No one was more amused by the full circle of Durand's casting in the new film than his mom, who remembered his boyhood fear of the apes. "When I told my mom that I was cast, she just started to laugh, and said 'well, this is perfect.'"

Durand is no stranger to the makeup chair (he played Blob in the *X-Men* franchise, and will likely get a little messy in this spring's *Abigail*). But the motion capture technology of *Kingdom* was a welcome break from the rubber and glue. "I was happy to try something new. I have nothing against prosthetics, but at the same time it's really laborious."

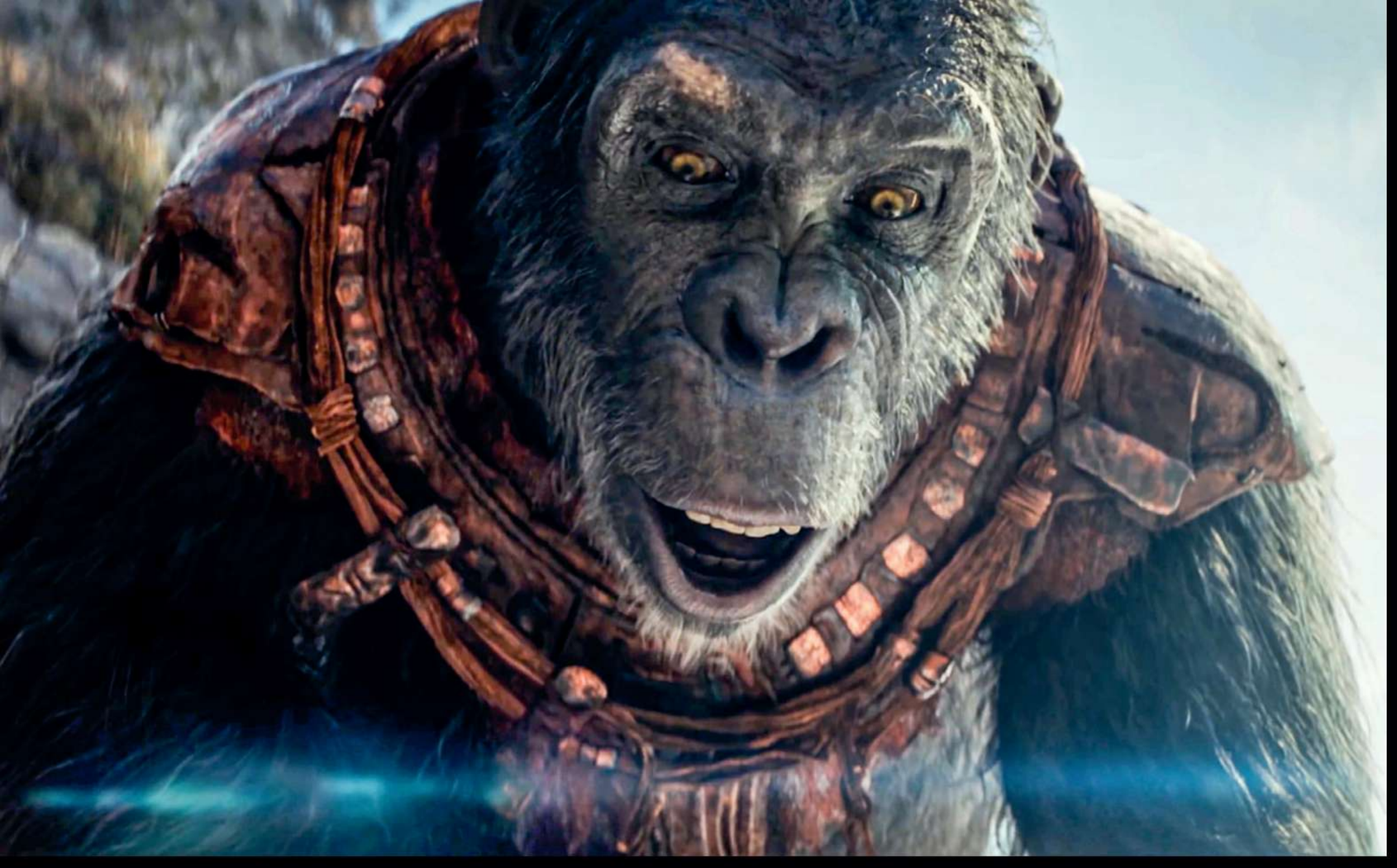
In contrast to his Gen-Xer co-star, Teague grew up watching the motion capture performances of Andy Serkis and dreamed of one day being able to step into that mo-cap leotard. "The thing that I was into when I was a kid was Peter Jackson's *King Kong*, which came out when I was seven. And seeing Andy do Kong was what made me want to become an actor," Teague reveals. The 25-year-old, whose genre work includes *IT* and *The Empty Man*, says "I was born when, essentially,

300 YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF CAESAR, THE APES (LIKE NOA, SOONA AND ANAYA, ABOVE), CONTINUE TO EVOLVE, THOUGH IN THE CASE OF PROXIMUS CAESAR (KEVIN DURAND, OPPOSITE), NOT ALWAYS FOR THE BETTER.

"I'VE HAD TO LEARN HOW TO PULL BACK A LOT BECAUSE I'D WALK INTO AUDITIONS AND I WOULD SCARE PEOPLE. . . WITH THIS ONE, I WAS ENCOURAGED TO LEAN INTO THE BEAST."

- KEVIN DURAND

KEVIN DURAND PHOTO BY CREATOR: JOHN RUSSO



motion capture was invented. I saw the technology get really good over time, and I was always just so fascinated by it."

Durand discovered a newfound freedom under the pixels. "When you're hiding behind the prosthetics and you look into the mirror, you see something different and that gives you this incredible license. But when you're doing this type of digital work, the character you see in your head and your imagination just *is*, and you just immerse yourself into the work."

For the actors, that work began with the now-familiar "ape bootcamp" with movement instructor Alain Gauthier. Beyond the expected movement training, Proximus Caesar's booming voice would be a crucial element in the film, and Durand put in the work to assure it didn't disappoint. "We discussed anatomical differences, and I started looking into the trachea and the way that the throat and the voice worked; 'how would I get human sounds out of that?' And so we dug into that, and that informed the way that I sounded."

Nailing Noa's voice presented a similar challenge for Teague. "The trick was getting the voice to be reflective of the character and also feel ape-y, but not *too* ape-y, because this is 300 years later. Kevin's got this big, huge booming deep voice, and Peter Macon, who plays Raka, has the voice of God; he can say anything and make it sound good. I don't have that. Noa basically sounds like me, but there's extra texture there. It's a little deeper. So it was subtle stuff that I wanted to do, but it was tough to find."

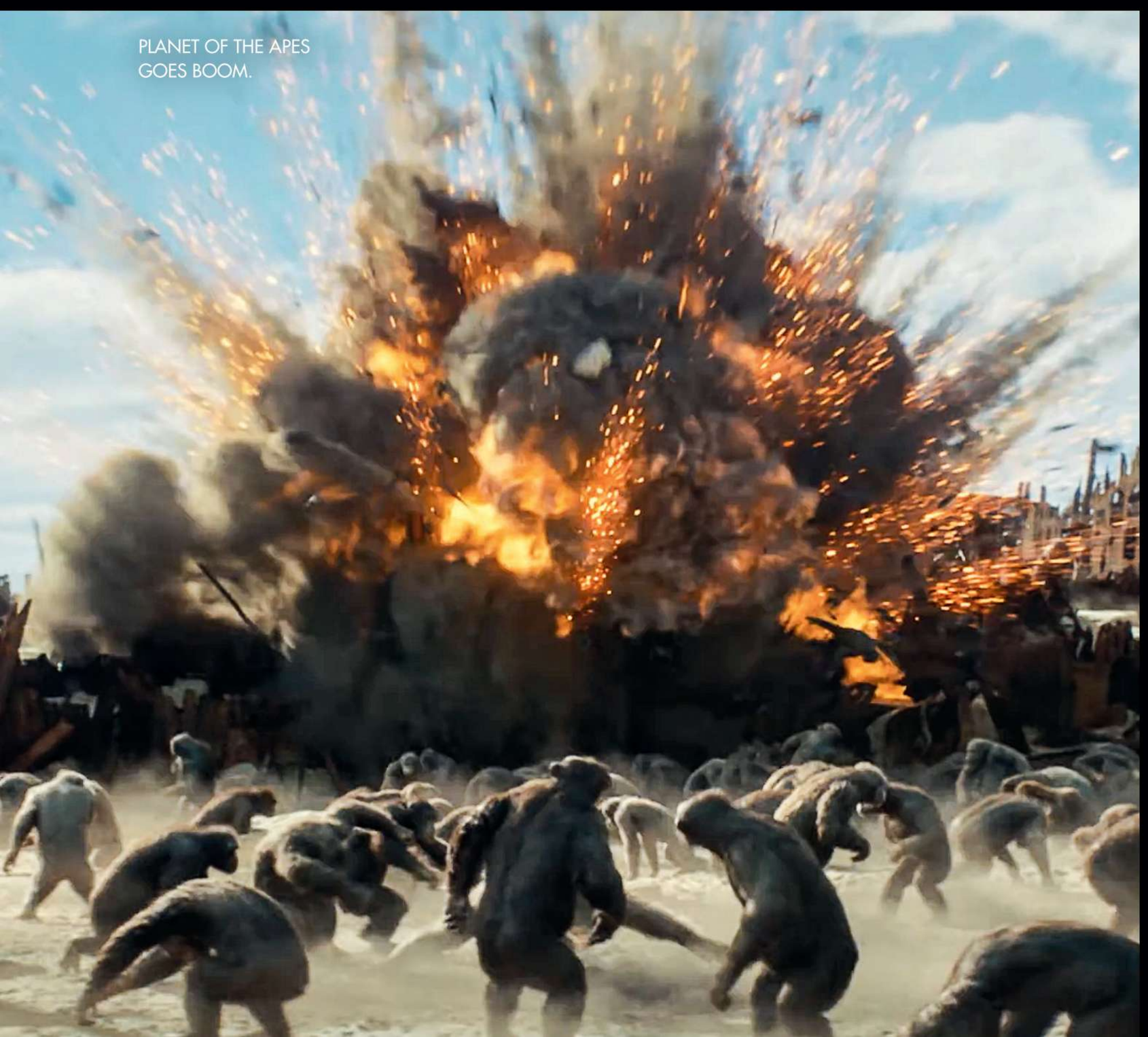
Motion capture can be daunting to actors who've never done it before, and Teague felt the pressure. "I was worried about things like how I would react to being on the Volume [an LED-powered digital soundstage used to great effect in recent projects like *The Mandalorian*] and being on an empty stage in spandex and with a camera strapped to my face… 'Is that going to make it harder? Is that going to make it really boring?'" As he headed into filming, the actor approached the shoot with more than a little anxiety.

"And it turns out most of it is *not* that," Teague shares with relief. "Mocap has gotten so good, they can take it out into the Australian Outback and do whatever they want to do with it. Working with the technology, nothing's different except for you. This is acting boiled down to what acting is at the very core. And you get to play with everything you've got."

Durand speaks with glee about the freedom the process afforded him, no longer worried about a wrinkle or blemish appearing in close-up. "That human vanity that we carry around all the time — it was all gone." And he realized he was suited for the role in more ways than one. "Because I have a very rubbery face and body, and I live on the verge of all of my emotions all the time, [my default is] very big and intense. I've had to learn how to pull back a lot because I'd walk into auditions and I would scare people. My agent would say, 'What did you do? Because they don't want to see you again.' I've learned to hold back, whereas with this one, I was encouraged to lean into the beast."

While the realm of digital performance left a great deal up to the performers' imaginations on set, they were provided with visual references as to what they'd eventually look like in the film.

"Wes showed me this great picture of Proximus wearing his crown, with this expression, and it definitely helped



PLANET OF THE APES GOES BOOM.

OWEN TEAGUE PHOTO BY CREATOR: JOHN RUSSO

> "I GET TO LEAD A HUGE TENTPOLE BLOCKBUSTER, AND I CAN STILL GO TO THE GROCERY STORE AND NOBODY CARES. . . IT'S WONDERFUL."
>
> - OWEN TEAGUE

inform me, but it didn't limit me in any way," says Durand. "I had less of an image, but more of a feeling of who he was." Teague got to confront his alter ego on set. "They made a photorealistic, life-size head of Noa that they would stick in frame to get lighting reference at the end of each shot. And it looked like me; it had my eyes. And Wes was like, "Look, if I put your face over it, your proportions line up. And he was geeking out about this, how he shifted things around on the face and, somehow, it looks like me."

But even with detailed references, neither actor has seen the finished film and regard the final product with a special level of anticipation.

"The last three *Apes* were so good. Critics love them, audiences love them. And they're regarded as the blockbuster series for smart people," Teague says, alluding to the pressure *Kingdom* is under to deliver. "They're fables that get at something that other kinds of stories can't."

"I don't know if I've ever been so excited about seeing a character of mine on screen," Durand says. "It went from my mind, to the minds of these brilliant artists out at Wētā. I just did some ADR for it recently. It was so far beyond what I could have hoped for. I was watching it with tears welling up, just going, 'that's what I always dreamed.'"

Ironically, this high-tech gig reconnected Durand to the passion that initially sent him down his career path. "The guy who made me want to be an actor was Gary Oldman. I would watch him from film to film and go, 'How is that the same guy?' And I would think, 'that's what I want to do.' For me, it's all about getting to go and hopefully disappear in parts." Teague is also a fan of the public invisibility mocap affords its actors. "I get to lead a huge tentpole blockbuster, and I can still go to the grocery store and nobody cares. I heard somebody on the subway talking about the trailer for *Kingdom*. I was sitting two seats down and I was like, 'they have no clue.' It's wonderful."

While *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* is set 300 years after his death, Ball says, "Caesar is in this new movie, spiritually, throughout everything. His ideas of morality and decency and his relationship with humans – all that is explored through an almost mythical lens." Fitting then that the production hosted a visit early on from Caesar himself. Andy Serkis visited the performers before filming started to offer encouragement, advice, and his blessing. It's a moment Teague won't soon forget. "I know they say don't meet your heroes, but he couldn't have been more gracious and wise. He was wonderful. I hope he likes the movie. That's who I'm most nervous about seeing it." 💀

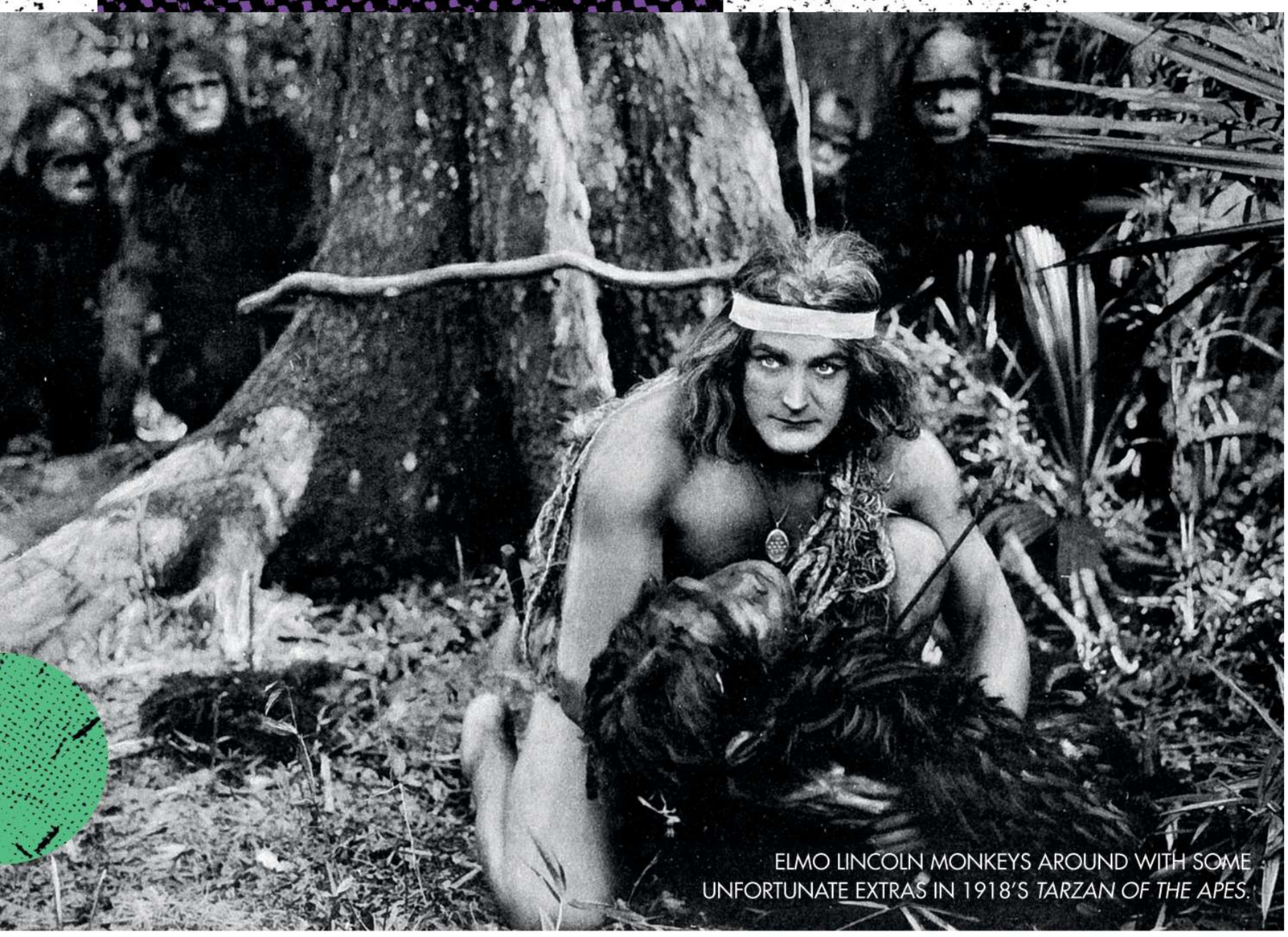
A *PLANET OF THE APES* TRADITION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE COLLIDING IN A PERILOUS RECKONING. ON A BEACH.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANS PLAYING APES

BY ANTHONY EVERITT

From gorilla suits to mocap suits and everything in between, we monkey around with the business of simulating simians.

It's strange to think that before the advent of social media and the revelations of Koko, the great apes seemed like a formidable bunch. Even stranger that the humble gorilla suit, alike the gag of choice for frat bros and repressed weirdos with manifestos, was at one point the work of skilled craftsmen. In the early 20th century if you had an ape suit you probably had some background in fabrication and sculpting. To complete the effect on-screen required a measure of athleticism, and some knowledge of ape behavior was a plus. But the efforts of the early pioneers, commonly referred to as "The Gorilla Men," inspired a steady stream of innovations through the decades, culminating in the uncanny motion capture CGI technology, which is so indispensable to the industry today (for better or worse), and which many Fangorians will no doubt be enjoying with me on May 24th, when *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* hits screens.



ELMO LINCOLN MONKEYS AROUND WITH SOME UNFORTUNATE EXTRAS IN 1918'S *TARZAN OF THE APES*.

As with any effects topic, pinning down a definitive "first" in a film is difficult. Perhaps the earliest extant examples are *Man's Genesis* and its sequel *Primitive Man*, released respectively in 1912 and 1914 by auteur and Junior Klansman Merit Badge recipient D.W. Griffith, which portray hunched over "cave-men" haphazardly matted with a fur-like substance. It's not exactly Lon Chaney, but it's a living. The first known film to utilize full ape suits was 1918's *Tarzan of the Apes*, which concerned an entire shrewdness of chimp-like characters. In 1920, pro wrestler Bull Montana appeared as an ape in *Go and Get It*, and again in 1925 in the silent classic *The Lost World*, both times in unsettling makeups by Cecil Holland under the direction of Perc Westmore. But the job of creating the body suit for the latter film fell to a bright young Filipino sculptor named Carlos "Charlie" Cruz Gemora.

Westmore next tapped Gemora to build a proper suit, complete with hands, arm extensions, feet, and a full mask for *The Gorilla* in 1927. Gemora was so openly appalled by the gorilla's performance in the finished film that he later got to appear in his own suit, an ambitious reworking of his previous design, in his 1928 follow-up *The Leopard Lady*. Movable jaws weren't new, but Gemora also connected the jaw mechanism to the lips, making them curl into a snarl when the mouth opened past a certain threshold. Otherwise he relied on his "body-english" and eyes for expression. The face sculpt itself was a credit to his growing skill and interest in lab work, and his performance obviously benefited from a serious study of apes. However, he did not benefit personally from smothering in fifty-plus pounds of kapok (a tropical plant fiber, which helped fill out his 5' 2" frame) and a layer of yak hair.

After appearing in several mystery farces, comedies, and Tarzan pictures, Gemora decided that there were to be no opportunities to pass himself off as a real gorilla, free of anthropomorphic plot devices, short of co-producing a hoax documentary. The ensuing success of 1930's *Ingagi* attests to the American public's misconceptions of apes and the humanity of African tribes, and Gemora fooled the scientific community to such an extent that the Hayes Code committee forced him to sign a confession later that year. Unsurprisingly the controversy only intensified public interest in the film, creating the perfect climate for *King Kong*'s success three years later.

The subsequent rise in B-movie ape pictures and serials for Poverty Row studios required a fresh crop of "Gorilla Men." Most of them couldn't have contrasted more with Gemora, who approached his craft with a mix of creative intensity and ingenuity. You might say these were the jocks of the ape world: predominantly stunt men who may not have built their own getups or studied the animals they purported to represent.

Ray "Crash" Corrigan was by far the most prolific. Although best known for starring roles in Western and action serials, his earliest forays into acting

RAY "CRASH" CORRIGAN, SERVING GRUNT ON THE SET OF *WHITE PONGO*.

were in gorilla suits. Said suits weren't generally known for realism and their leering comic book menace didn't exactly inspire sympathy, but nobody minded. He went through several suit designs, his most iconic appearing between 1944-1947 in *Nabonga*, *White Pongo*, and *The White Gorilla*. But fifteen years of toil in around sixty pounds of hot, unventilated gorilla suit took its toll, and in 1948 Corrigan sold his suits to a keen and hale Steve Calvert, former stuntman-cum-bartender. Calvert managed to land bigger budget roles early on but the much ballyhooed "studio collapse" of the '50s was already in full swing. The days when Charlie Gemora co-starred with Bela Lugosi in horror films such as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *Island of Lost Souls* were long gone. Instead you had Steve Calvert in *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla*, and an off-brand Martin and Lewis was somehow the main draw. *The Bride and the Beast* in 1958 (brainchild of the great Ed Wood Jr.) and *Robot Monster* in 1953, starring yet another stuntman turned professional gorilla, George Barrows, certainly have provided untold joy to this day, but the gorilla suit clearly had lost its moment.

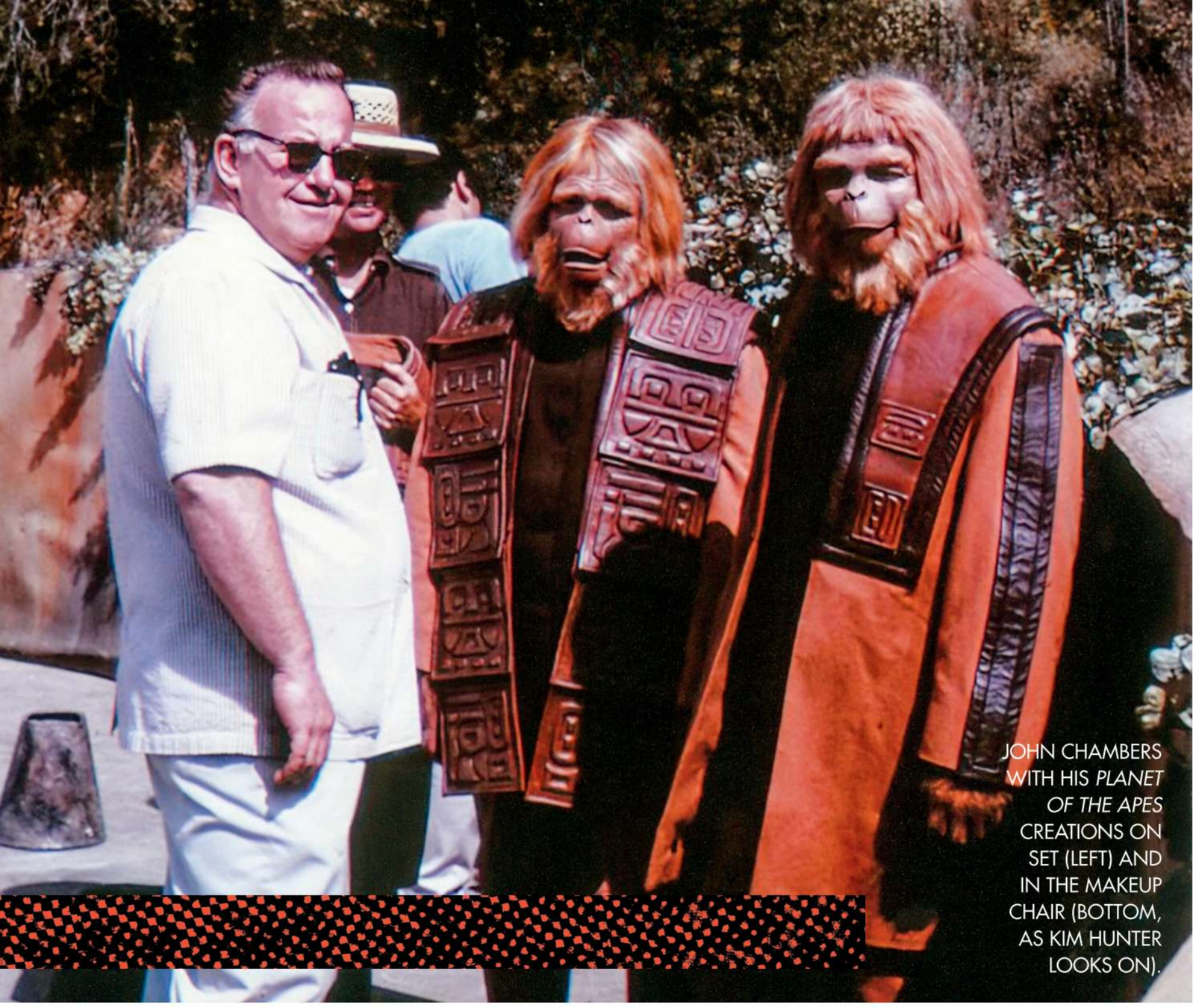
Meanwhile, Gemora turned increasingly to his inventive lab and makeup work and relied less on muscle. 1941's *The Monster and the Girl* featured arguably his most convincing suit and nuanced performance, but after suffering a near fatal heart attack at age forty he backed off the gorilla roles. Tragically his life ended before he had the chance to merge his familiarity with ape physiognomy and mastery of foam latex appliances on *Planet of the Apes*; instead, that job went to John Chambers, a relatively green artist who had nevertheless blossomed quickly in part thanks to his extensive experience in surgical prostheses.

BRIDE OF THE BEAST (LEFT) AND *INGAGI* NUDGED GORILLA SUIT TECH FORWARD A BIT AT A TIME.

At this point the quality of Chambers' work on the film seems implicit. Through a genius for design and logistics he achieved a consistent, lifelike look for dozens of ape actors and extras, creating a slew of memorable characters – a monumental feat considering the budgetary restraints. But essentially, these are all bipedal hominids; Chambers wasn't concerned with redistributing body mass or creating any animatronic devices to convince the audience. For all their visual interest, even Stuart Freeborn's ape creatures in *2001: A Space Odyssey* were proportionally human. It wasn't until 1976 that the gorilla suit regained any of its former stature, and the progression leading to that point can be traced to the influence of special effects archivist and second-generation ape-man Bob Burns.

At first Rick Baker was no doubt impressed when he met the man who assisted Paul Blaisdell on two early Corman dreck-fests, and Burns gladly mentored the wunderkind in special makeup effects. But Burns' passion for fantastic monsters was equaled by a fascination with the great apes, and his career as Kogar the gorilla in various television programs, low-budget films, and live "spook shows" eventually overshadowed

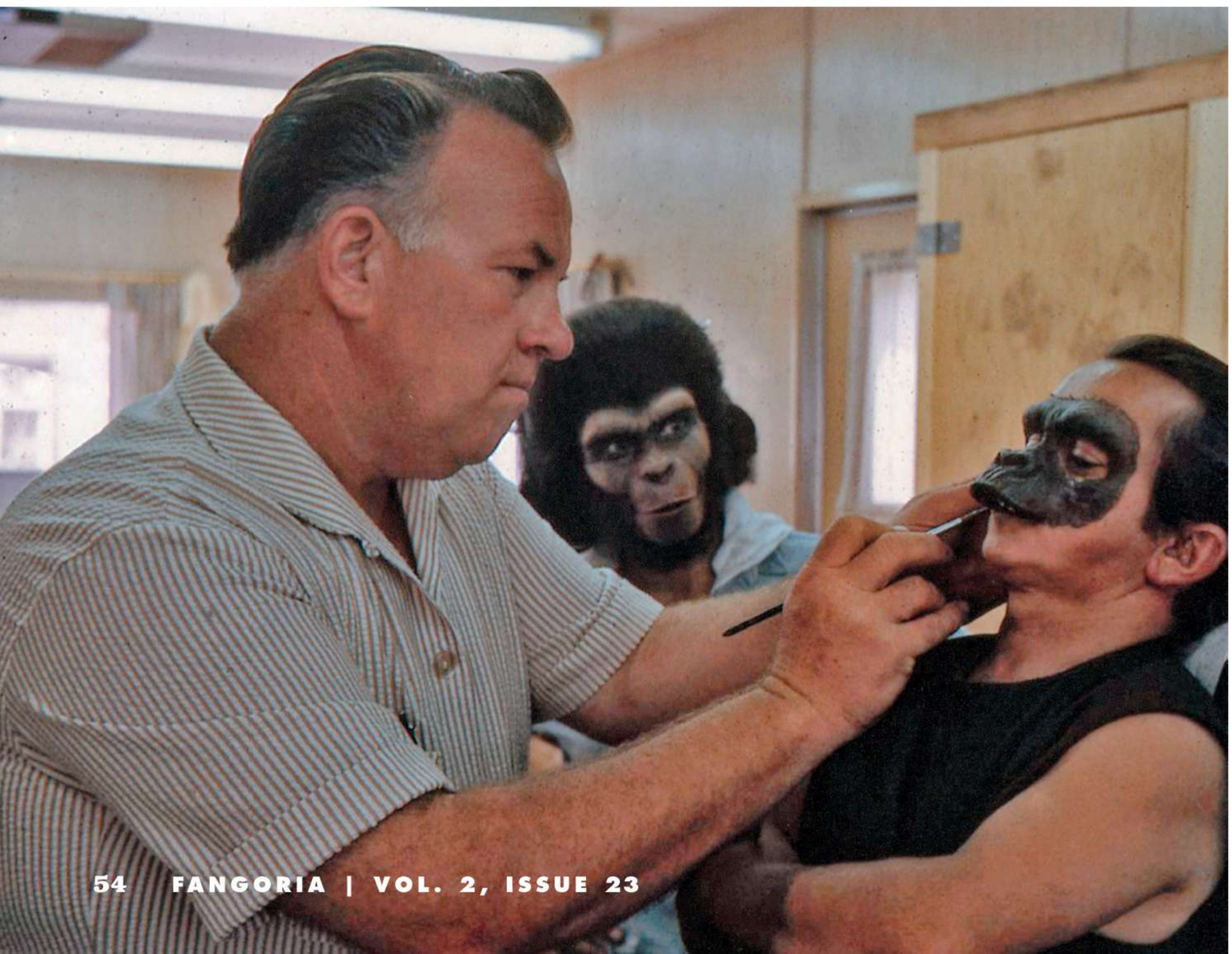
ROBOT MONSTER COUNTS, RIGHT?



JOHN CHAMBERS WITH HIS *PLANET OF THE APES* CREATIONS ON SET (LEFT) AND IN THE MAKEUP CHAIR (BOTTOM, AS KIM HUNTER LOOKS ON).

his other pursuits. His part-time employer, Don Post, built the head, hands, and feet, while his wife, Kathy, built the rest.

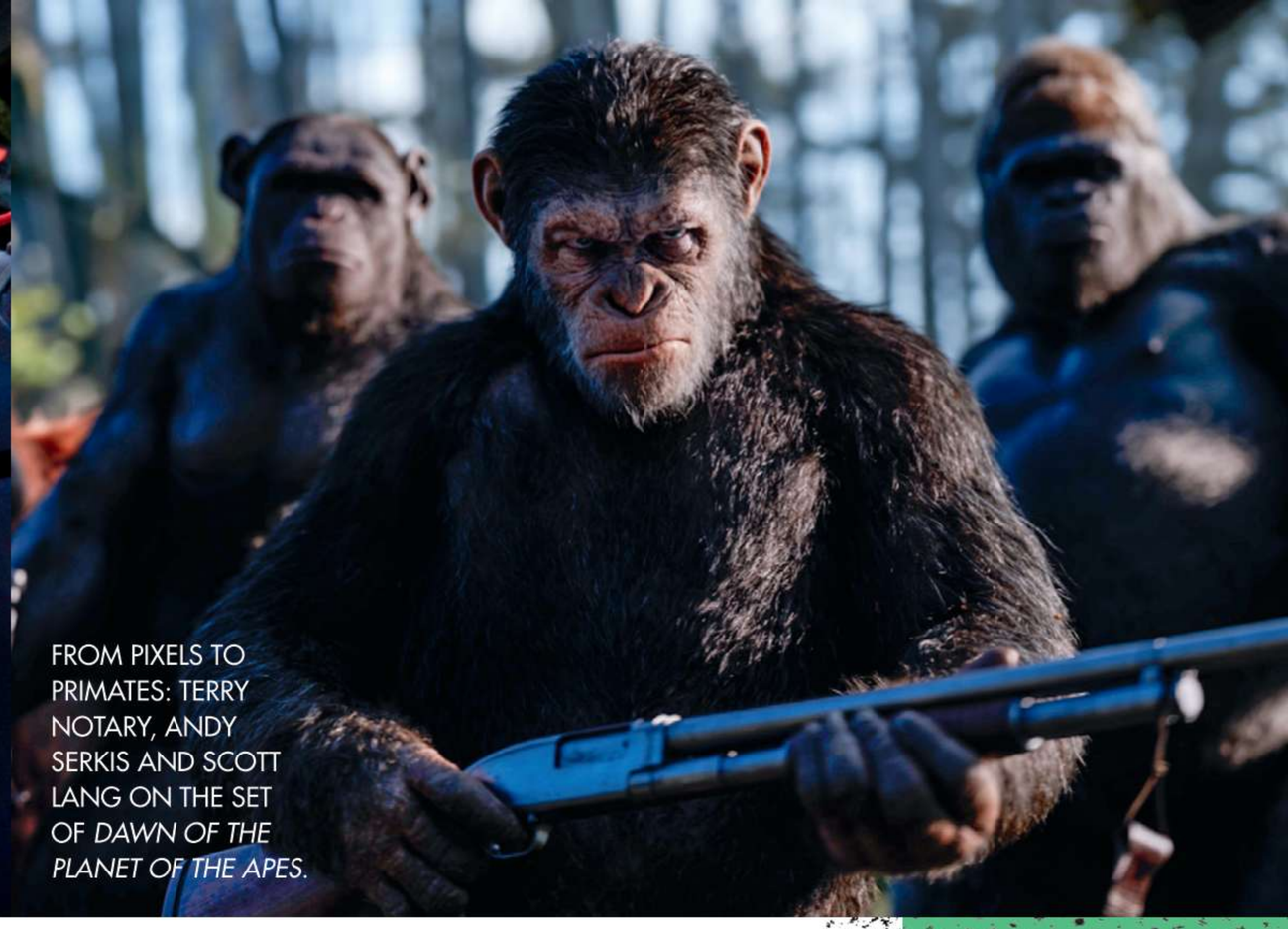
Baker quickly internalized this fascination and, ever the student, began experimenting exhaustively with his own makeups and suits. Fewer than eight years later he was inspiring praise from John Chambers on the set of John Landis's deceptively titled *Schlock* for his "missing link" creature, ironically a textbook example of Dick Smith's overlapping technique for facial prosthetics which Chambers previously dismissed as unnecessary and time-consuming. Soon after sculpting a new head, chest piece, and hands for Bob Burns' Kogar suit, which then appeared as 'Tracy' in the 1975 Saturday morning live-action show *The Ghost Busters*, word reached Baker of Dino De Laurentiis' *King Kong* project. De Laurentiis and his production team did less than inspire confidence in initial meetings, but Baker's youthful enthusiasm and determination got the better of his judgment. Ultimately, despite being constantly undermined and nearly killed at every turn, the relative sophistication of the under-suit fabrication and the four cable-operated animatronic heads he built were a critical step in the right direction.



In 1981, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* at last provided him the creative freedom he was hoping for on *Kong*, resulting in a distinctly more realistic suit and performance from Baker in the character "Sydney" (which says more about De Laurentiis than anything). His next project, 1984's logistically daunting *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, absorbed all his energies behind the scenes and introduced him to the dubious blessings of delegation. Bringing all his accumulated knowledge to bear (including the use of mixed foam densities for enhanced musculoskeletal definition), Baker organized up to seventy assistants to create around thirty fully articulated, anatomically unique ape creatures. Meanwhile a young method actor named Peter Elliott ("Silverbeard") showed up so well prepared that he was appointed "primate choreographer" for the duration of filming.

But the continued reliance on cables for facial articulation was a nagging problem, not least because it severely limited the actors. With that in mind the conspicuously tall forehead for the eponymous "Harry" of *Harry and the Hendersons* (1987) was a natural design choice for Baker, providing a plausible compartment for remote controlled servo motors. Another advantage was full range of expression in one head piece, eliminating the need to switch between scenes. Kevin Peter Hall (*Predator*) wore the suit, forming an intuitive connection with the operators on set which made for an extraordinary performance.

This concept was parlayed into the gorilla designs for Baker's 1988 film, *Gorillas in the Mist*. Like a less objectionable *Ingagi*, the film seamlessly matched Baker's suits with real footage, which presented Peter Elliott ("Simba") and fellow *Greystoke* veteran Jonathan Alexander ("Digit") with the challenge of performing blind behind radio-operated gorilla eyes for continuity. Additionally, the body fabrications created longer torsos by compensating for pelvic mass and extending the glute muscles. In 1998, the eyes in the *Mighty Joe Young* suits fed video to the actor inside (no doubt appreciated by Alexander),



FROM PIXELS TO PRIMATES: TERRY NOTARY, ANDY SERKIS AND SCOTT LANG ON THE SET OF *DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

and of course there was an emphasis on oversized robotics, operated by use of "Waldos" (the motion capture technology of puppeteers, for the kids out there).

In 2001 Fox perplexingly chose Tim Burton to steer the *Planet of the Apes* remake; thankfully the makeups emerged unharmed by the filmmaker's encroaching malaise (Baker's one condition for accepting the job was the freedom to not "Burtonize" his work). After thirty-plus years of refining his craft, it's unsurprising that the results were exceptional. But the era of CGI was upon us; by 2005 Peter Jackson could safely rely on the medium for an effective *King Kong* remake and, of course, advanced performance capture technology.

Technically, motion capture was around long before cinematography (much of it involving the use of suits lined with lightbulbs) and rotoscope animation techniques worked on a similar principle as far back as 1917. What we recognize today as a motion capture suit was developed for medical purposes at MIT in 1983; the applications for animation weren't fully appreciated until the early naughts, when some agent of chaos rendered a 3D Jar Jar Binks model. But since that day, Andy Serkis quickly became the undisputed king of optical performance capture, and his astute understanding of kinesthetics has kept him consistently sewn into mocap suits since 2001, especially in ape roles. Bringing pathos and primal agility to the simian anti-hero of Jackson's *Kong* and the sympathetic freedom fighter "Caesar" in the first three *Planet of the Apes* prequels, it's easy to say that Serkis is this century's first true "Gorilla Man." And while the nature of the suit may differ, the force of imagination and intelligence animating it remain constant. Currently Serkis appears to be stepping away from the franchise, but his quality of work seems to have already inspired a wave of other performers, many of whom have come up alongside him and will be part of the awesome spectacle on screen this spring.

TIM BURTON'S 2001 *PLANET OF THE APES* (WITH TIM ROTH AS THADE, RIGHT) MIGHT BE THE LAST WORD IN SIMIAN MAKEUP FX, THANKS TO THE INCREDIBLE WORK OF RICK BAKER.

THE NIGHT TERRORS OF SLEEP

Director Jason Yu speaks out about his chilling new South Korean horror film.

By Amber T

Even the most zealous zombie fan or voracious vampire lover would be hard-pressed to deny that real life can easily be more frightening than any horror put to screen. *Sleep*, the debut feature from South Korean writer/director Jason Yu, preys on this, using creeping, subtle scares to exploit the intense vulnerability of relinquished consciousness. More ominously, the film asks the question: do you really know the person sleeping next to you at night?

SOO-JIN (JUNG YU-MI, LEFT) AND HYUN-SU (LEE SUN-KYUN, RIGHT) ARE DEALING WITH A NIGHTMARE SCENARIO AS THEY PREPARE FOR THE BIRTH OF THEIR BABY.

Ahead of the birth of their first child, married couple Hyun-su (Lee Sun-kyun) and Soo-jin (Jung Yu-mi) find their once peaceful slumbers shattered when Hyun-su begins exhibiting strange and violent nocturnal behavior. As the pair desperately try to discover the cause of Hyun-su's nightly bloodlust, the terror increases tenfold with the arrival of their newborn. Ahead of *Sleep*'s May release, FANGORIA sat down with Yu to talk about Korean shamanism, the divide between Eastern and Western audiences and, of course, his unofficial title as Bong Joon-ho's protégé.

Sleep finds fear in simplicity, eschewing (as do many South Korean horror movies) an overreliance on guts, gore and predictable jump-scare fodder in favor of a horror that sneaks through quietly. The movie's tone is set by a simple, somniloquist utterance from Hyun-su that "someone's inside," serving as a harbinger of paranoia that further unravels the couple's sanity as the story progresses. Couples, whether married or otherwise, are a prime source of conflict in most horror movies, but *Sleep* subverts this trope – Soo-jin and Hyun-su are there for each other through thick and thin, viewing the mysterious affliction as something to overcome as a team, rather than leaving each other to tackle it alone. A romantic at heart, Yu's own personal circumstances while writing the screenplay helped hone this against-all-odds pair.

Yu says the strength of the leads' relationship "is actually the part of this film that's most precious to me. The relationship between Soo-jin and Hyun-su developed and evolved as I was writing the screenplay – my first and foremost goal was to create a fun horror film, but as I was writing it, a lot of personal elements started to seep in. At the time of writing, I was preparing to marry my long-term girlfriend, now wife, and maybe because of that I decided to make the protagonists married and have the story revolve heavily around their relationship. Most films about marriage – not even just horror films – are quite cynical about the institution. The central conflict usually derives from the internal relationship; either they have a huge fight or somebody falls out of love or somebody makes an irredeemable mistake… but because I was at the cusp of marriage, I suppose I had a more romantic view. I wanted to portray a couple who are *really* in love, best friends who believe and trust in each other, and throw an external obstacle their way that they have to overcome as a married unit."

JUNG YU-MI RETURNS TO THE GENRE AFTER HER COMPELLING TURN IN FAN FAVE *TRAIN TO BUSAN*.

> **"THE MOST UNIQUE HORROR FILM AND THE SMARTEST DEBUT FILM I'VE SEEN IN TEN YEARS."**
>
> - Bong Joon-ho

The realism of the on-screen relationship is undoubtedly solidified by its two performers. Shockingly, just a few months after *Sleep*'s South Korean theatrical release, star Lee Sun-kyun passed away, a tragedy that sent shockwaves through the South Korean film industry and prompted a nationwide discussion on the press and media's treatment of celebrities. It's particularly poignant to watch his performance as Hyun-su, an actor struggling to find his feet in a fickle industry. The role is full of the emotion and relatability for which Lee Sun-kyun was so well-loved.

To most Western and genre audiences, Jung Yu-mi is best known for her turn in Yeon Sang-ho's *Train to Busan*, in which she also played a fiercely protective mother-to-be who exhibits profound mental and physical strength despite her delicate condition. As two of the biggest actors in South Korea, their casting in the debut from an up-and-coming filmmaker is a testament to Yu's obvious talent.

And the director still can't quite believe his luck in casting: "While I was writing, I never had an actor in mind. Lee Sun-kyun and Jung Yu-mi are legendary actors in Korea – they're incredibly hard to cast. When I showed my screenplay to the producer, he asked who my dream casting was. 'If money was no object, who would you want to cast?' He asked because we would surely never be able to get anyone on their level, but maybe we could find someone similar. I said, 'I know it's impossible, but if I had the choice, it would be Jung Yu-mi and Lee Sun-kyun as the couple.' Many Western audiences might not be aware of just how huge they are in the country, so I never thought it would actually happen. But I remember that producer saying that good actors gravitate towards interesting scripts, and it wouldn't cost anything to just show it to them. Miraculously, they

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAGNET RELEASING

liked the script and wanted to meet me. I literally just begged them to come onboard and they were gracious enough to say yes."

It's not only South Korea's acting elite who were impressed by the film. Even though *Sleep* is his debut feature, Yu has worked with some of South Korea's most exalted living directors. The bilingual Yu translated the official English subtitles for Lee Chang-dong's mystery thriller *Burning*, and during his time working as AD on the 2017 eco-drama *Okja*, Yu became acquainted with its director, Oscar-winning *Parasite* titan Bong Joon-ho. Bong, who gave Yu notes and advice throughout development of *Sleep*'s script, called the movie "the most unique horror film and the smartest debut film I've seen in ten years." Yu doesn't take this praise lightly:

"I remember being so shocked. He was my boss for a long time, and before that he was my cinematic hero. He's a legend of South Korean cinema and I look up to him intensely. Him just watching *Sleep* would've been enough of an honor, but to hear him say such high praise... I felt incredibly lucky and was so grateful."

While Yu has established himself as an original voice with *Sleep*, there are clear stylistic homages to the domestic horror subgenre dabbled in by Bong (who was himself influenced by Kim Ki-young's *The Housemaid* for *Parasite*), as well as themes of postpartum paranoia that proudly call to mind classics such as *Rosemary's Baby* or even Darren Aronofsky's anxiety-inducing epic, *Mother!*. When asked to touch on more of the films that influenced the early stages of production, however, Yu recalls learning an important lesson:

"While writing, editing and producing I didn't really have a conscious reference point, which was a rookie mistake on my part. It drove the cast and crew crazy," Yu says. "*Sleep* being my first feature, I didn't know how important it was to bring references to the table, and I thought everything would be evident through the screenplay. A good director must effectively communicate what they're going for, and one of the best ways to do that is to provide bountiful references. Even the great Martin Scorsese still starts every new film by showing his cast and crew tons of screenings. It was actually only after the film was released and I spoke with audiences that I started to become conscious of my influences. People asked if I was influenced by *The Shining* or *Rosemary's Baby*, and it was only then that I realized: of course I was! Although I wasn't conscious of it, because of how much I love those

THE SOUTH KOREAN SUPERSTARS WERE DRAWN TO DIRECTOR JASON YU'S TWISTY, THRILLING SCRIPT.

YU, LEFT, DIRECTS HIS LEADING LADY, WHO DOES NOT LOOK THRILLED AT THE PROSPECT OF DUMPSTER DIVING.

movies and have watched them so repetitively, they must've been flowing in my blood. Every time an audience member mentions an influence that they can see, it's like discovering something new about your own movie."

With a pair of national treasures attached and a glowing recommendation from the country's most beloved filmmaker, it's no surprise that *Sleep* was a box office hit in South Korea. Having experienced such an overwhelmingly positive response from film fans both in his home country and overseas, Yu noticed certain differences between what resonated between these two distinct audiences:

"I got a lot of questions from international audiences about whether including the shaman was a critique of trusting religion or medical science. But to me, this was just part of portraying regular life in Korea," he says. "Like many Asian countries, Korea is paradoxical in that aspect. We're incredibly reliant on medical science. In the United States, it's harder for people to visit the hospital so regularly, but in Korea if you get even a small cut or have a minor cold, you run straight to the doctor or pharmacy and can easily access the treatment or medicine that you need. But opposing that is a more traditional spirituality that makes up an important part of Korean culture. If you gathered ten Korean people in a room, I'm willing to bet that five of them have consulted a shaman at some point in their life to ask for guidance, or shoo away a negative spirit. Maybe one or two of those people might even have a *bujeok* in their wallet for good luck or prosperity. In theory, these two elements coalescing doesn't make sense, but somehow in Korea it just makes sense. For example in Korea, if you suspect you're being haunted by a ghost, the next logical step is to call a shaman. I didn't give it much thought, I was just portraying regular Korean society, but international audiences saw a very different take on it."

That conflict of science vs. spirituality plays into a wider cinematic framework applicable across South Korean cinema: the refusal to be boxed into one certain idea or theme. South Korean films frequently blur the boundaries between serious drama and black comedy, abject horror and subtle thrills; they offer a refreshing nuance when it comes to depicting morality that a lot of Western media is often scared to play with. This blend of dread and pitch-black humor is part of what makes South Korean horror so exciting – and *Sleep* is no different. During the film's dramatic denouement, Soo-jin whips out a full PowerPoint presentation to convince Hyun-su of her theories on haunting.

Yu says of the funny and unexpected scene: "Soo-jin works in the HR department of a big Korean corporation – PowerPoint is her main weapon. For her, it's the best way to convince Hyun-su. That scene was an incredible challenge because PowerPoints are the least cinematic thing in the world," he laughs. "Even when the scene was greenlit, the cast and crew kept asking if we were actually going to do it, and if we were going to use flashbacks or something instead. We tried to make it as effective as possible – at that moment I wanted the audience to be completely wrapped in Soo-jin's argument; I wanted it to be the most persuasive thing in the world. I wanted those skeptics who, like Hyun-su, believed in none of this, to start thinking that she has a point, or maybe she's right. The PowerPoint sequence was the part of the film I was the most nervous about, but when I showed it to Bong Joon-ho, he said that was the best part! That stamp of approval made me so relieved. If he likes it, then we must have done something right."

With such a successful debut under his belt, the cinematic world is now Yu's oyster. After displaying a natural flair for horror, Yu could easily continue to play in that sandbox, but a more unexpected genre is also calling his name:

"I would love to stay in horror. I have two projects that I'm currently thinking about seriously. One is similar to *Sleep*, staying in the thriller/mystery genre, but larger in scale. But I'm also deeply passionate about the exact opposite. This might be very unexpected but as an audience member, my guilty pleasures are romantic comedies! It's always been my dream to create a romcom, but nobody's excited about that project except for me."

We beg to differ, Jason! 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM (OR COMMIT TERRIFYING ACTS OF VIOLENCE). YU TUCKS IN JUNG YU-MI AND LEE SUN-KYUN.

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SMOKING KILLS

JANE BADLER ON TRIM SEASON

BY MEREDITH BORDERS

THE GENRE ICON SPARKS UP A CONVERSATION ABOUT ARIEL VIDA'S WITCHY, CANNABIS-LACED HORROR.

The synopsis "horror movie set at a weed farm" brings with it certain ideas. But with *Trim Season*, director Ariel Vida seems determined to blaze through every expectation. This is not some goofy slasher-comedy about wasting a group of stoners. No, *Trim Season* is dark and gothic, mystical and violent, and headlined by an otherworldly performance from the legendary Jane Badler.

CONTAINS THC

BUDDING ROMANCE? WAIT, THAT'S MONA (JANE BADLER) AND HER SON (CORY HART).

I THINK THAT CAULDRON'S CASHED, DUDE.

Badler is best known, of course, as the ultimate baddie in the 1983-1985 science fiction series *V*, and has gone on to punctuate her impressive career with memorable genre roles. In *Trim Season*, Badler plays Mona, who runs a cannabis farm with her two sons (Ryan Donowho and Cory Hart) on a remote mountain in Northern California. A group of 20-somethings desperate for cash (played by Bethlehem Million, Alex Essoe, Bex Taylor-Klaus, Juliette Kenn De Balinthazy and Ally Ioannides) sign up as trimmers, working 18-hour days preparing the bud for sale. It's not long before they learn that Mona's product is more black magic than White Widow, and that they have no escape from the dark mysteries that hide on the mountain.

Badler is also a producer on *Trim Season*, and she knew as soon as she read the script (by David Blair, Sean E. DeMott and Cullen Poythress) that she had to play Mona. "I was incredibly drawn to the character of Mona," she says. "I've done a lot of horror films, a lot of different films, but never that kind of scrumptious role that I could really dig my teeth into." Badler became protective of the character, and helped shepherd the script over the next two years, working with producers DeMott and Aaron B. Koontz to find the perfect director in Vida, whose previous film *Vide Noir* impressed them all with its "languidity and atmosphere," says Badler.

"I just loved the arthouse feel of the way she directs," she adds, and while *Trim Season* is thoughtful and sophisticated like the best arthouse cinema, that's not to say there's not plenty of blood. It opens with a shocking bit of violence that sets the pace for the rest of the film, the brutality backdropped by striking production design – perhaps unsurprising, as Vida worked as production designer for such genre faves as *V/H/S/85* and *The Endless*.

"She came on, and then she had a very strong idea of how she wanted to see the script. So she and I worked together for about a year, and I was very strong about rewriting the character of Mona," Badler says, adding that neither she nor Vida wanted Mona to be a "one-dimensional villain."

And there's certainly nothing one-dimensional about Mona as she exists in the film, this alien, elegant presence that presides over a kingdom of kush, draped in pearls and offering both menace and guidance to the young trimmers. Visual touchstones for the character included Tilda Swinton in *Edward II* and Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger*, but there's also something utterly singular about Mona's look, an aesthetic that sets the character apart as surely as Badler's performance.

After sending pictures of some of her ideas to costume designer Hayley McCune, Badler says, "she *nailed* it. I just loved all the costumes. I thought they were fantastic, because the character is quite odd, and she definitely lives in another world, to dress like that in the middle of the forest. I mean, you're not going to a ball, you're not going to a black-tie event. She dressed in this very eccentric way, and I loved that. It really helped me a lot with my character, the way Hayley dressed me."

Sure enough, that eccentricity imbues every part of Mona's character, from the obscurely unsettling relationship she shares with her sons – here Badler uses words like "sexual, sensual," "total power" and "brainwashed" – to the sorcerous way she moves. At one point in the film, Mona puts on a tango record and begins to dance, a riveting sequence that Badler says required very little direction for her part. "I just knew how Mona moved, no one had to say a word to me, and I could feel the silence of the set. And when I danced, I just loved it, and everyone applauded at the end."

As abundant as Badler's presence is in the film, her costars meet her every step of the way, especially the two trimmers with whom she shares the most screentime: Million and Taylor-Klaus. Bethlehem Million (*Sick*) plays Emma, the heart of the film, a down-on-her-luck service industry employee who has trouble standing up for herself

MONA PUTS HER BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS INTO GROWING THE BEST PRODUCT. (SHE PUTS OTHER PEOPLE'S BLOOD IN IT, TOO.)

until Mona takes her under her wing. Badler describes their characters' interplay as "a bit like a honeybee. It's like the smell of her, the scent of her youth, is an aphrodisiac to me. So I play that idea of enticing her, of getting her to trust me, of making her love me, knowing all the time that the kill is going to be so delicious to me." As a performer Million "was just free and loving and generous, the easiest, most delightful person to work with," Badler enthuses. "On top of that, she's just an extraordinary actress. She cries so easily. I always envy that, when an actress can just cry, you know?"

Bex Taylor-Klaus got their genre start on television, with notable runs in *Scream: The TV Series*, *iZombie* and *The Killing*, and here they play Dusty, whose endearing vulnerability both complicates Mona's relationship with her youngest son Malcolm (Donowho) and boosts the stakes in some of the scarier sequences of the film. There's a compelling push-pull with the alluring Mona and skeptical Dusty that Badler says the film comes by honestly.

"You know, they're an exceptionally good actor. And I think it took time. It was an interesting dynamic that I had with them," she says. "I sometimes think that with actors, they're waiting for you. Highly intelligent, talented actors are sometimes waiting for you to show them that you're good. And that's okay, because I will rise to the challenge." Which Badler did, of course: "After they watched me act, I think there was a lot of respect, and I like that, that I had to prove to them that I was worthy of their respect."

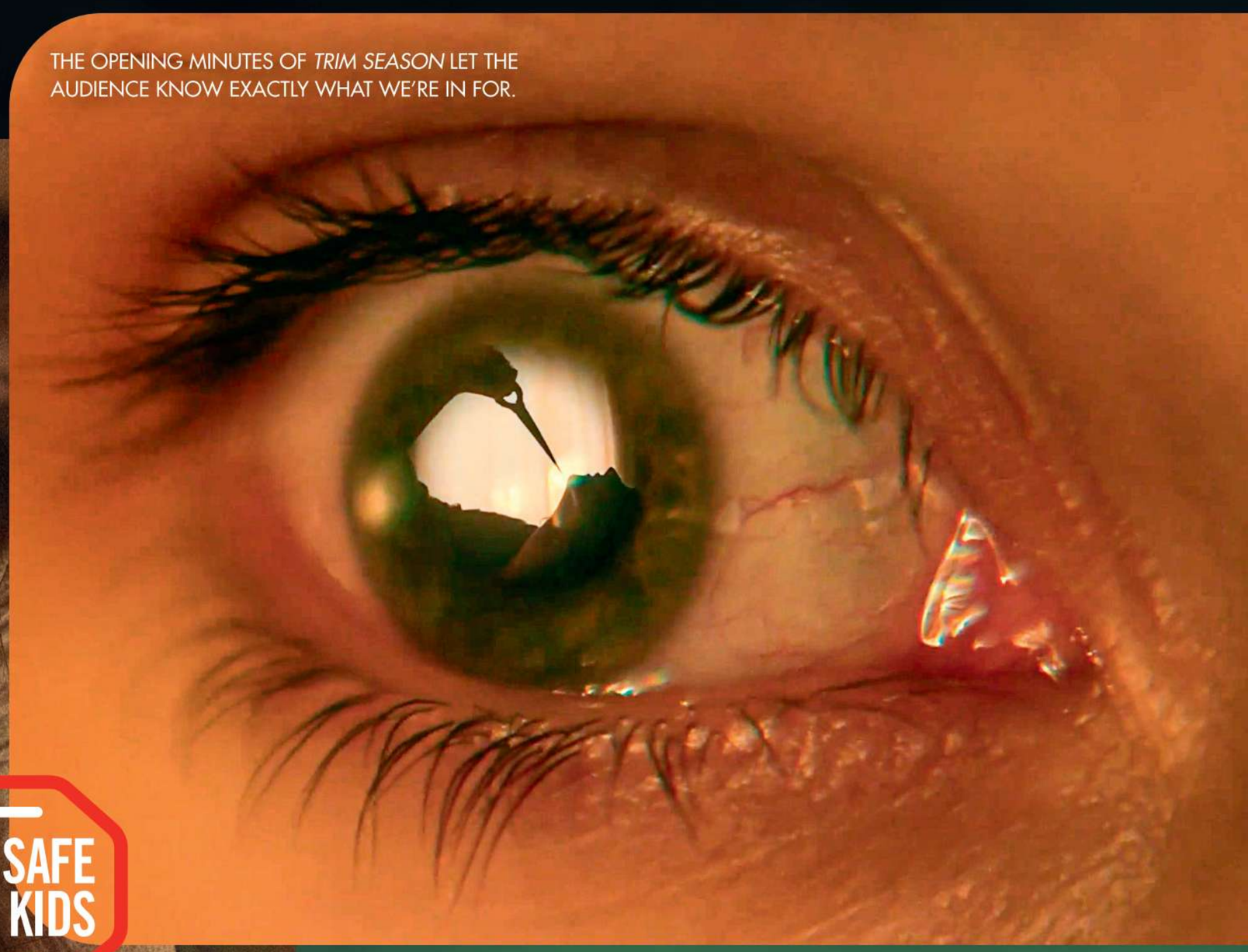
All of these intriguing character entanglements are made knottier by their surroundings, the imposing trees of mountainous Utah standing in for behind the Redwood Curtain. While Badler admits that Utah had "the exact sort of topography" Vida was looking for, the spectacular location came with its challenges. "There was a moment where we were up in the mountains, and we're shooting in the middle of the night, and all of a sudden a mean moose arrives, right? A big, mean moose. So we all had to run into the little cabin and shut the door and hide. We all had to be really quiet until the moose went away."

The night shoots take their toll in other ways, of course. "Once the sun starts coming up, you're totally delirious," Badler says. And the most extreme moment of *Trim Season*, which is saying something, was shot on the very last night, the entire team racing to finish a stunt-heavy sequence before the sun rose. For Badler, who gave years of her life to this project as both star and producer, it was a powerful moment.

"I was so emotional when the whole thing was over. It sounds really strange, but I feel like in some ways it was also a legacy to my son who passed away, because he had literally passed away a year before," she says. "I have to say that I think that's why, when it was over, I just felt like, *'I did it.'* I did something that was very difficult for me, and I went places that were very emotional for me. Even though Mona's an evil character, I tried to make her more than that."

Trim Season arrives in June. 💀

THE OPENING MINUTES OF *TRIM SEASON* LET THE AUDIENCE KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WE'RE IN FOR.



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NOT SAFE FOR KIDS

THE ARCHITECT OF INDIAN LAKE

BY JOSH STOLBERG

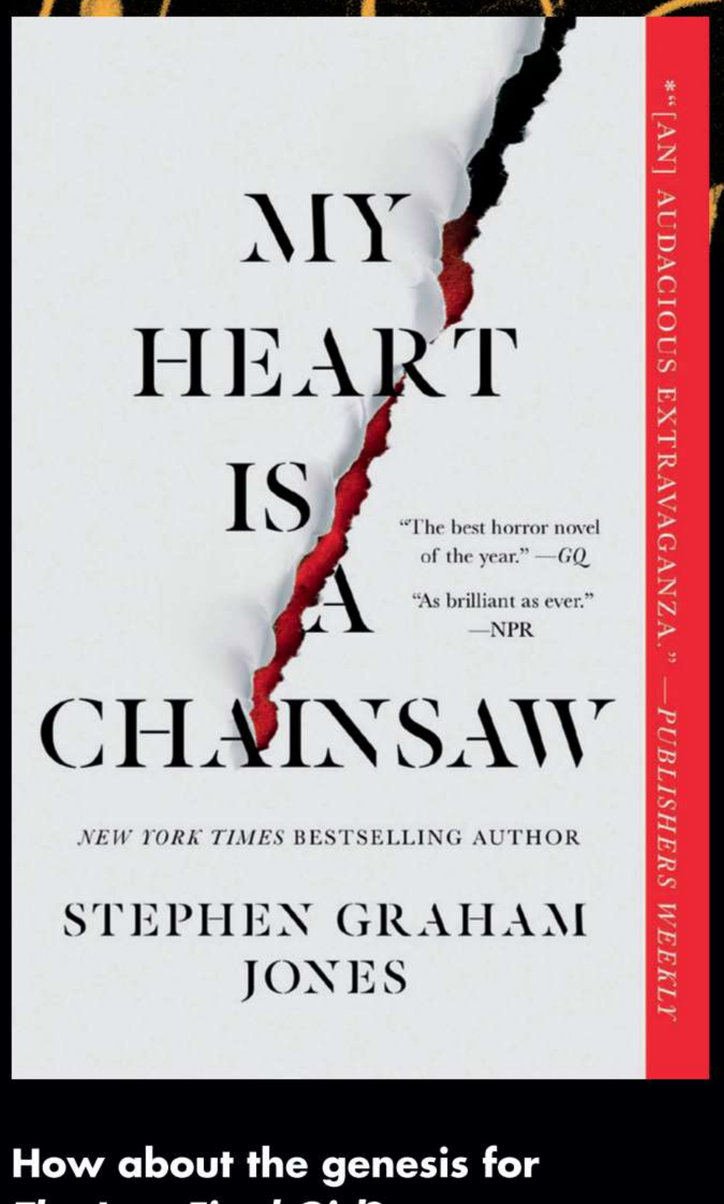
AUTHOR STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES DISCUSSES HIS DECADES-LONG CAREER AND THE CULMINATION OF HIS ACCLAIMED *INDIAN LAKE TRILOGY*.

Editor's note: Stephen Graham Jones is the award-winning author of around 30 books, most recently including The Indian Lake Trilogy. *(He's also a recurring columnist in this very magazine – check out "Slasher Nation" on page 14!)*

Jones' acclaimed horror trilogy just came to an end with The Angel of Indian Lake, *out March 26 from Simon & Schuster. We asked screenwriter Josh Stolberg (*Saw X, Spiral, Piranha 3D, Sorority Row*) to speak with Jones about his expansive career.*

You are, hands down, my favorite author writing in the genre today. I feel like not only are you writing outside the box, you start off by pouring gasoline on the box and setting it on fire. As an example, *Night of the Mannequins* opens simply enough, but it takes these crazy twists, then ends with such a fun reveal that I was mad at you for being a better writer than me. So, tell me, how do you approach your writing?

Going into *Mannequins*, all I really had was the title. I didn't know anything that was going to happen, and the whole time writing it, I knew it was about to turn to crumbles in my hand and blow away. That's how it always is with me. I have no idea where a thing's going, how it's going to get anywhere. All I know is that this is an idea that not only shouldn't work, but it also probably needs a more capable writer to save it. But then, too, I'm the only one with my pen on it, so I keep scratching, and just trust instinct and luck, and go as fast as I can, trying to never stop to think. Thinking's the worst thing for writing, to me. All it does is slow you down.


MY HEART IS A CHAINSAW
"The best horror novel of the year." —GQ
"As brilliant as ever." —NPR
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES
*"[AN] AUDACIOUS EXTRAVAGANZA." —PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

How about the genesis for *The Last Final Girl*?

There's probably a bit of proof-of-concept for Jade in *My Heart is a Chainsaw* there. That hybrid screenplay-prosey way I got it down on the page, though, that's just because it was a movie in my head, and I was going really fast, didn't have time to stop and translate it into a more conventional novel-delivery mode.

PHOTO BY GARY ISAACS

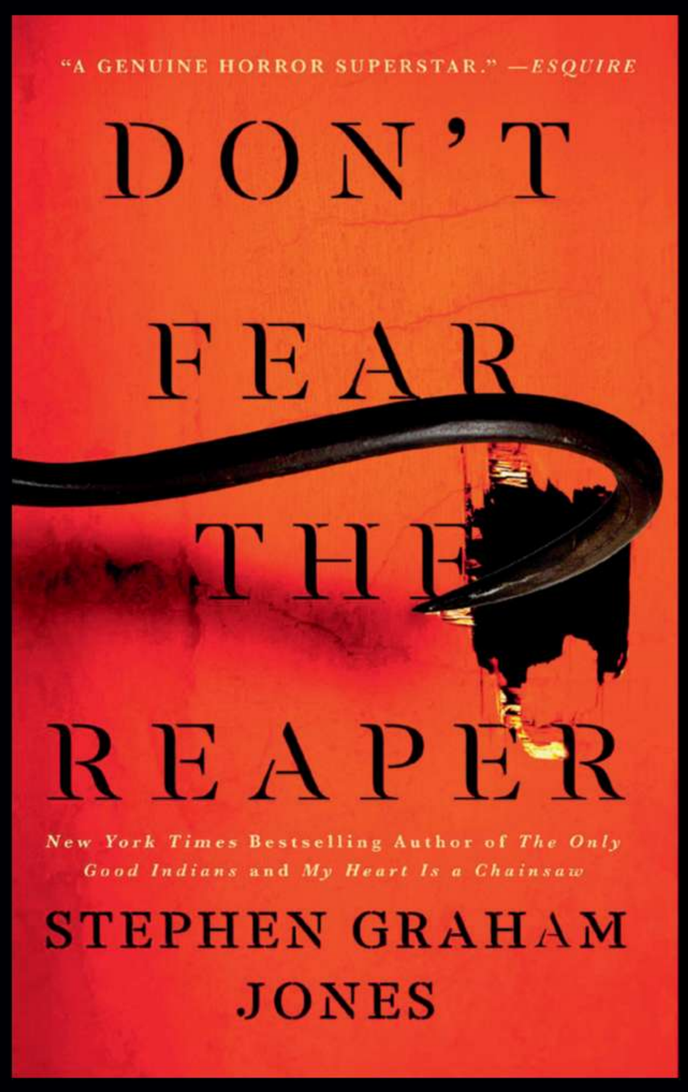
I absolutely loved *Mongrels*. Again, you managed to take a sub-genre, in this case werewolves, and attacked it in a completely original and unexpected way.

Yeah, I wanted to tell a werewolf story that wasn't big and grand, with full moons everywhere, and an unlimited bank account. That's not the world I know – it's not the world I can make real on the page. The world I can make real on the page is the one I grew up in, where we're moving every year, every six months, and there's all kinds of violence and just badness going on, but we're trying to hold onto each other through it all. That's what growing up was for me, so that's what I tried to get down, in *Mongrels*. Take away the werewolves, and it's autobiography.

Who were some of your influences, both writers and filmmakers?

Kevin Williamson, of course. You – the first of your stuff I ever saw was *Sorority Row*, fifteen years ago or whenever, and I was hooked, man. Wes Craven and John Carpenter, of course. There's never been anybody as good in a tight hallway as Wes Craven, and Carpenter uses the camera like a paint brush.

For novelists, for a long time it was Thomas Pynchon and John Barth and Gerald Vizenor, and they'll always be part of my DNA. But writers, we're snowballs rolling across the landscape. We pick up all kinds of random stuff, and then hold it close, pretend like it's been part of us all along. Louise Erdrich and Philip K. Dick are that for me, or they're what I try to be and do, anyway. Stephen King, too, of course. And Charles McCarry, the spy writer. Larry McMurtry, Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Art Spiegelman and Alison Bechdel. I'm so excited for the second part of Emil Ferris' *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*. Jeff Lemire, Cullen Bunn. Junji Ito. Ursula K. Le Guin. Robert McCammon. Octavia Butler. And Chris Carter. *X-Files* pretty much changed the trajectory of my life. The horror novel from the last ten years that I've read the most, I think, is Mike Bockoven's perfect *FantasticLand*. Even when I'm not reading that book, I'm probably thinking about it.


"A GENUINE HORROR SUPERSTAR." —ESQUIRE
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REAPER
New York Times Bestselling Author of The Only Good Indians and My Heart Is a Chainsaw
STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES

Okay, can we talk a bit about your *Indian Lake Trilogy*? I fell in love with Jade Daniels. Why is Jade the perfect final girl, without seeing herself as a final girl at all?

I guess Jade showed up for me in about 2017, 2018? The first draft of *My Heart is a Chainsaw* was called 'Lake Access Only' in 2013, and Jade wasn't there. When I got into the novel again, I had no idea how to make this thing work, but I knew I had this lake, this gated community, and a sheriff. And then Jade just sort of stood up from the shallows, trying to document and theorize on why this massacre had happened – the book she was writing was going to be her ticket out of Idaho. But when I gave these versions to early readers, they all said it was cool when Jade was talking, kind of boring otherwise. That told me Jade was my main character.

And I think what gives her legs, story-wise, is that she would never call herself a final girl. By her standards, which are the standards we all sort of inherit or distill from watching so many slashers, she doesn't qualify. She's not an angel-warrior-princess-scholar-athlete-beauty queen. Jade sees herself as very damaged goods – which is a violence she's doing to herself, but it's one she's internalized from the way she's been treated. But what makes a final girl isn't her grades, it's not whether she's homecoming queen, it's not how high she can kick, it's what she's got in her chest. It's her *heart*. Which Jade has more of than she'd admit. Really, I kind of suspect that's why she tries to wrap herself in such a thorny exterior. It's because she doesn't want people to see how much she really cares. But it's how much she cares that gives her her strength, that keeps her from quitting when it would be so easy to.

When you finished that new draft, were your reps pushing you for a sequel right away, or was it when the book turned out to be a hit? And will you actually be able to say goodbye to Jade? Having JUST finished *Angel of Indian Lake*, I will not accept that this is the final chapter.

Ha, yeah, I don't even want to have to think about saying goodbye to Jade. She's a favorite, for sure. But the best way to be nice to her now, I think, it's to leave her be. I never planned on her carrying a trilogy, though, no. *My Heart is a Chainsaw* was only ever intended to be a one-and-done. Even after finalizing it, even after it came out, it was just a standalone. Until my agent and editor asked me what was next. I told them Book 2 in the *Indian Lake Trilogy*, as if I'd had that planned all along. But I hadn't. I just wasn't ready to say goodbye yet, I guess.

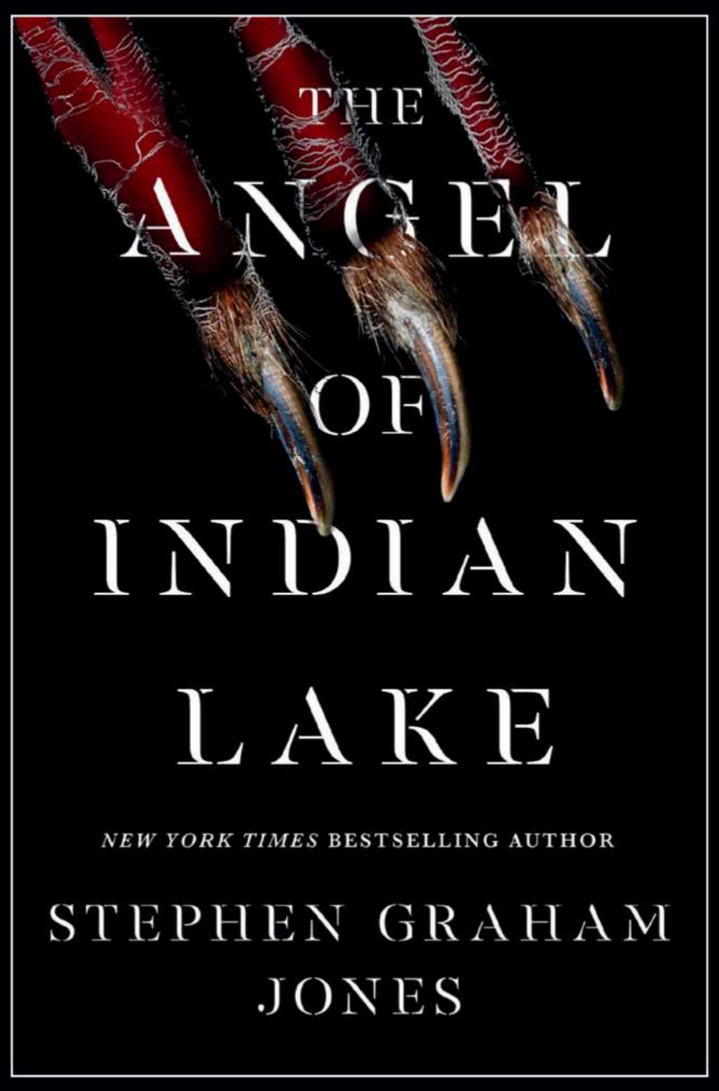
Okay, I'd love to do a little lightning round for horror. Favorite horror villain?

Nix, from *The Lord of Illusions*. I like how we don't have to get burdened with his long and surely complicated backstory, which would probably just make him into another victim. He's just evil. He wants to murder the world.

Favorite final girl?

Nancy Thompson, from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. She's a final girl who uses her mind, not her muscle, and that's how you win. But, like Jade, I'm also pretty partial to Connie, from *Just Before Dawn*. And Laurie Strode, man. When it comes down to it, she's putting herself between Michael and her babysitting charges. That's what it's all about, isn't it?

Favorite drive-in horror B-movie that you'd hide the VHS box cover from your parents so they wouldn't confiscate it?



We didn't have a VCR until probably 1990, the year I was supposed to graduate high school, and I didn't really start watching grindhouse stuff until after that, but *Out of the Dark* from 1988 is the hide-it-quick one for me. It's got that clown with the baseball bat – that scarred me, in that good and necessary way. Not enough people talk about *Out of the Dark* anymore. It deserves it, though.

Name a few of your off-the-radar horror filmmakers.

She's pretty on the radar to me, and probably for everyone, but Leigh Janiak. I mean, *Honeymoon's* flat-out amazing, but that Wes Craven homage she has to be so intentionally doing in the cold open of the first *Fear Street*? That's the most impressed I've been with a filmmaker in a long time. I've watched that sequence so many times. It's got everything.

Favorite horror sub-genre and favorite title in that sub-genre?

Can "Is it real or is it Memorex" be a subgenre? If so, then *Jacob's Ladder*, forever. But if we're talking more traditional subgenres, and I consider Slasher and Haunted House and Possession and all those to be a click higher than "sub-," then… cannibalism, say. Which I'm really way too queasy to look directly at. But, *Gravy*, man, that one hits all the right notes for me.

Favorite foreign horror?

Probably *Rec*. So terrifying. It's one where the zombies aren't metaphors, they're just evil. I like them when they're like that. And I like a closed-door horror story. It feels so Agatha Christie.

One of my favorite things to talk about to my fellow horror creators is morality. Where do you land on the whole, 'you're putting evil out into the world' argument?

I do put a lot of bloody, uncomfortable ideas into the world with the stuff I do. That's just what's always roiling in my head, in my heart. But I don't do it to look at the bad. I do it to look at the good, in all of us. The good we can have, and use, if we really try. If we insist. Like final girls, right? Final girls are our model, I think. They fight against all odds, they fight when they could run away, and they don't stop until the bad is put down. At least until the sequel… 💀

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

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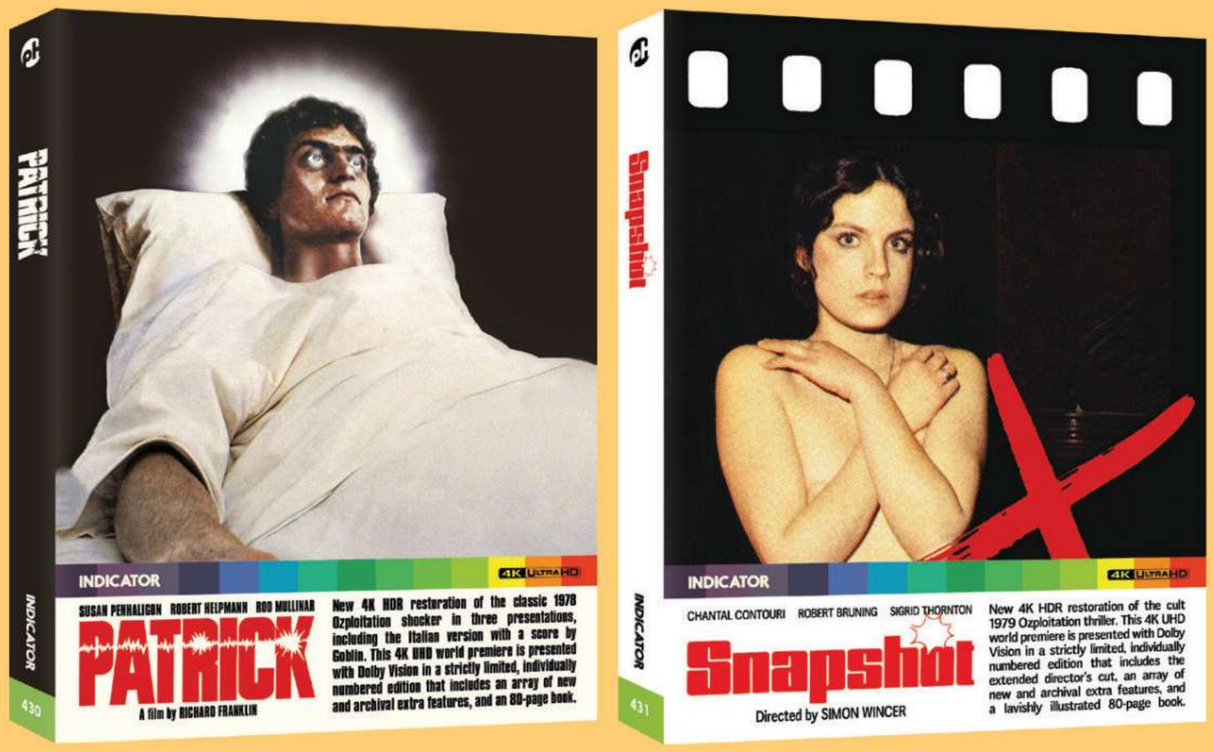
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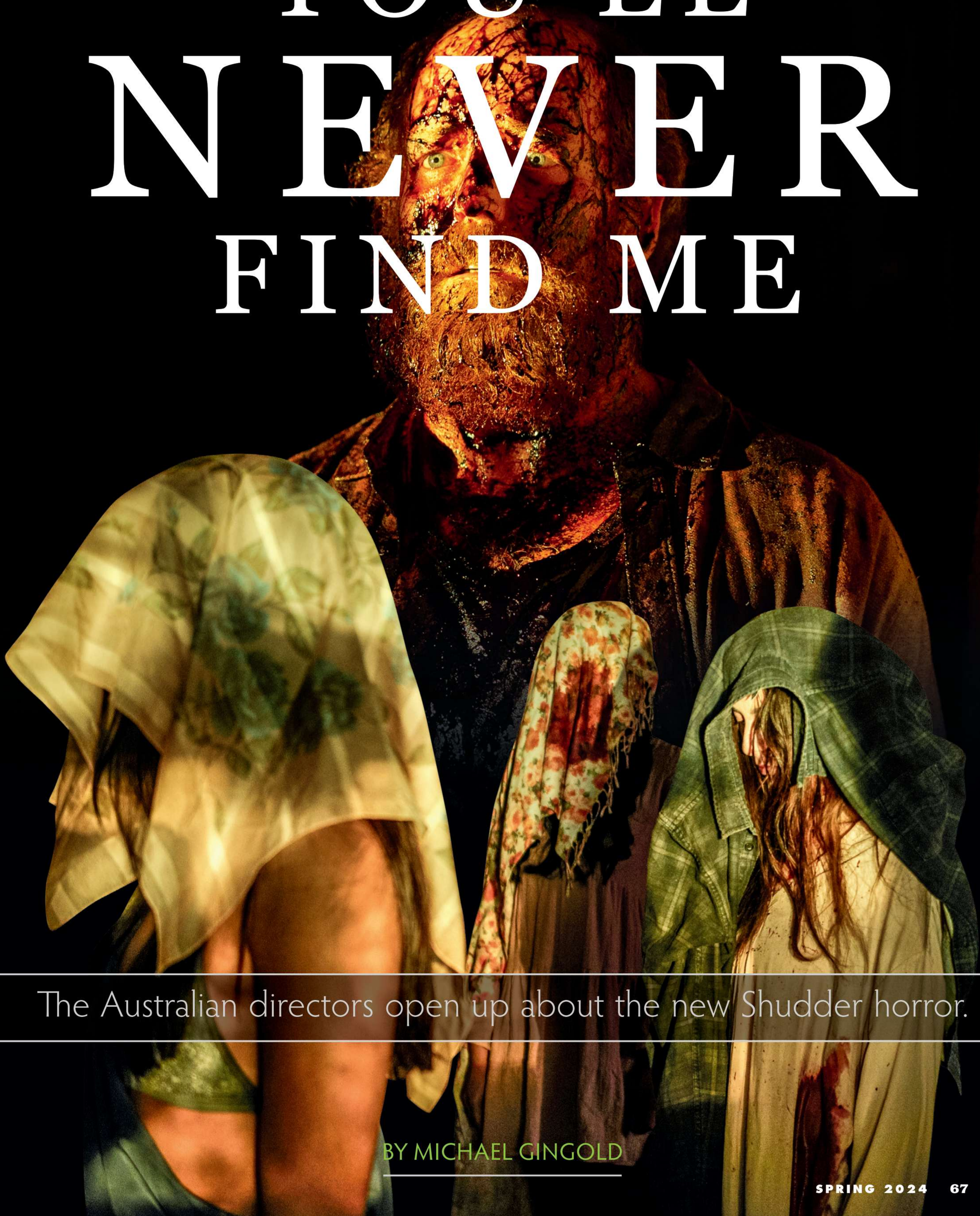
WE FOUND THEM:

Josiah Allen and Indianna Bell on

YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME



The Australian directors open up about the new Shudder horror.

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

The history of the horror genre is rife with filmmakers doing a lot with a little, stranding a limited number of characters in single locations and then tightening the screws. The epitome of this approach is achieved by Australian directors Josiah Allen and Indianna Bell in their first feature *You'll Never Find Me*. Now airing on Shudder, it focuses on just two people in one trailer in a remote RV park, and rivets our attention throughout, keeping us both guessing and uneasy about where their increasingly tense interactions are leading.

Brendan Rock plays Patrick, the trailer's resident, and Jordan Cowan is "The Visitor," who turns up at his door on a very stormy night, desperately seeking shelter. He lets her in reluctantly, and though you may think you know at first where this situation is going, Bell (who also scripted) and Allen (who edited the movie) unfold a series of suggestions and intimations that either one could be a threat to the other – or maybe they both are.

Drenched in shadowy, foreboding atmosphere, *You'll Never Find Me* is a knockout feature debut by the filmmakers, whom FANGORIA spoke to following the movie's world premiere at last year's Tribeca Film Festival.

How did your short-film work lead into this feature?

INDIANNA BELL: The first short we made was a single-take, 16-minute drama titled *Call Connect*, about a young helpline operator having her first day at a mental health call center, and the entire film is a conversation she has over the phone with someone in need of help. It's very simple and kind of stage-play-like, and the man on the phone, who you never actually see – you just hear him – is Brendan Rock.

JOSIAH ALLEN: That was our first collaboration.

BELL: We loved working with him, so then we thought that in our next short, we should actually see Brendan, because he's a fantastic actor. So the next one was a psychological thriller called *The Recordist*. That had a very different vibe from *Call Connect*, still very dialogue-heavy but a much darker mood. It's about a sound man on a film set who overhears this young actress having an affair with the director, and he uses that information to blackmail her; it's very dark and sinister.

That was the first time we met and collaborated with Jordan Cowan, and she and Brendan had a very different dynamic in that than what plays out in *You'll Never Find Me*. We thought they worked very well together, so we thought, 'OK, let's build off of what we've been doing' and write a feature that utilizes these two.

Was the confined, single location a creative decision first, or did it stem from production concerns?

BELL: With this being our first feature, we wanted to do something we could really control. There's obviously budget, and all the issues that come with finding the locations, the practicalities of shooting outdoors at night, and you're competing with

THIS PAGE AND FACING: DIRECTORS JOSIAH ALLEN AND INDIANNA BELL STUFF THEIR FEATURE DEBUT WITH SHOCKING TWISTS AND DISTURBING IMAGERY.

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weather, crazy people, noisy birds, cars and all that. So from a practical sense, we felt it would be great if we could keep it contained.

But also, the very contained movies are always our favorite kind. We felt it would be a great challenge to set that goal on our first film.

The storm outside the RV is almost a character in and of itself, and the sound design is very effective.

BELL: We love sound-heavy films, and that's one of the tools we have available, working in a lower-budget space, that allows us to expand the world. It's something you can use to immerse the audience, and we knew that if this film was going to be set in a single location, we had to pull out all the stops to give it an energy and an engagement the whole way through. Duncan Campbell, our sound designer, is awesome. The more he added to it and the more we pushed it, the more it added to the story and people responded to it.

ALLEN: He had an incredibly *dense* challenge. It's not just, oh, you can hear these audio effects; every second had quite a lot of thought put into it. We didn't want it to be distracting at the start; at that point it's just a storm, and then as the film goes on, and the rhythm and pace change and things start to unravel, it was important that sound be part of that. Also, the whole thing, from sound design to cinematography, needed a surreal nature that you hopefully notice more and more as the movie continues.

How did you visually approach building and sustaining the tension in a limited space with only two characters?

ALLEN: Something that was crucial, for visual interest but also for making things feel more claustrophobic and evolving, was that at a certain point in the film, the lighting drastically changes. As we were in preproduction with our amazing cinematographer Maxx Corkindale, we were discussing shooting it quite practically – for a big portion of the film, if someone's holding a flashlight or a lantern, the scene is lit by just that; there are no hidden lights anywhere. It was quite a challenge, and very brave of Maxx to jump into.

BELL: And the location itself comes with a built-in tension, because of its claustrophobic nature. In 99 percent of films, the audience gets a bit of a reprieve. Change of scenery, change of sound design. But because of this story happening in a single space, and it being continuous time, it feels like the whole film is just one scene, and you're being carried along from one moment to the next. It doesn't let you have that reprieve, which adds to the tension.

Did you shoot in an actual trailer or an actual trailer park, or was the interior a set?

BELL: I love that question; that means it worked!

ALLEN: Ninety-five percent of it, everything interior, was shot in a studio. Hannah Sitters, the production designer, and her team did an incredible job. We knew we wanted that extra bit of control a set offers. In a few sequences we needed to be able to float walls, and we could do that on a set. Actually, there was originally more floating of walls planned, but for that claustrophobic feeling, we kept using wide lenses close with the actors, so we ended up hardly moving walls at all. That forced us closer and closer, and that intimacy became very interesting.

We had one night exterior shoot, which was everything that was looking out, and then looking back toward the trailer…

BELL: The trailer you see there was also a set – in fact, just a flat. We actually took what they had built in the studio, trucked it over to the location and set it up. So if you moved slightly left or right, you'd see that there was nothing behind it.

The movie takes a big stylistic and tonal turn in the last 20 minutes, so can you talk in general terms about taking it in that more overtly horrific direction?

ALLEN: It was a fun challenge to hold off as long as possible, and build this pressure in the background – not just with the characters, but the environment around them. You could imagine an alternate version that might be handheld or in some different style, but we wanted to be as still as we could, like an audience member sitting there watching what's happening, so that when that change happens and that pressure has built up…

BELL: And the dam bursts, because we'd done so many long dialogue scenes sitting at a table and so forth, when it got to the point where we were running around with a handheld camera, it was a great change of pace.

ALLEN: Suddenly, we were allowed to do whatever we wanted with the camera, and throw out all the rules we'd tried to maintain. We knew that last section would be incredibly fun to shoot, and hopefully to watch. 💀

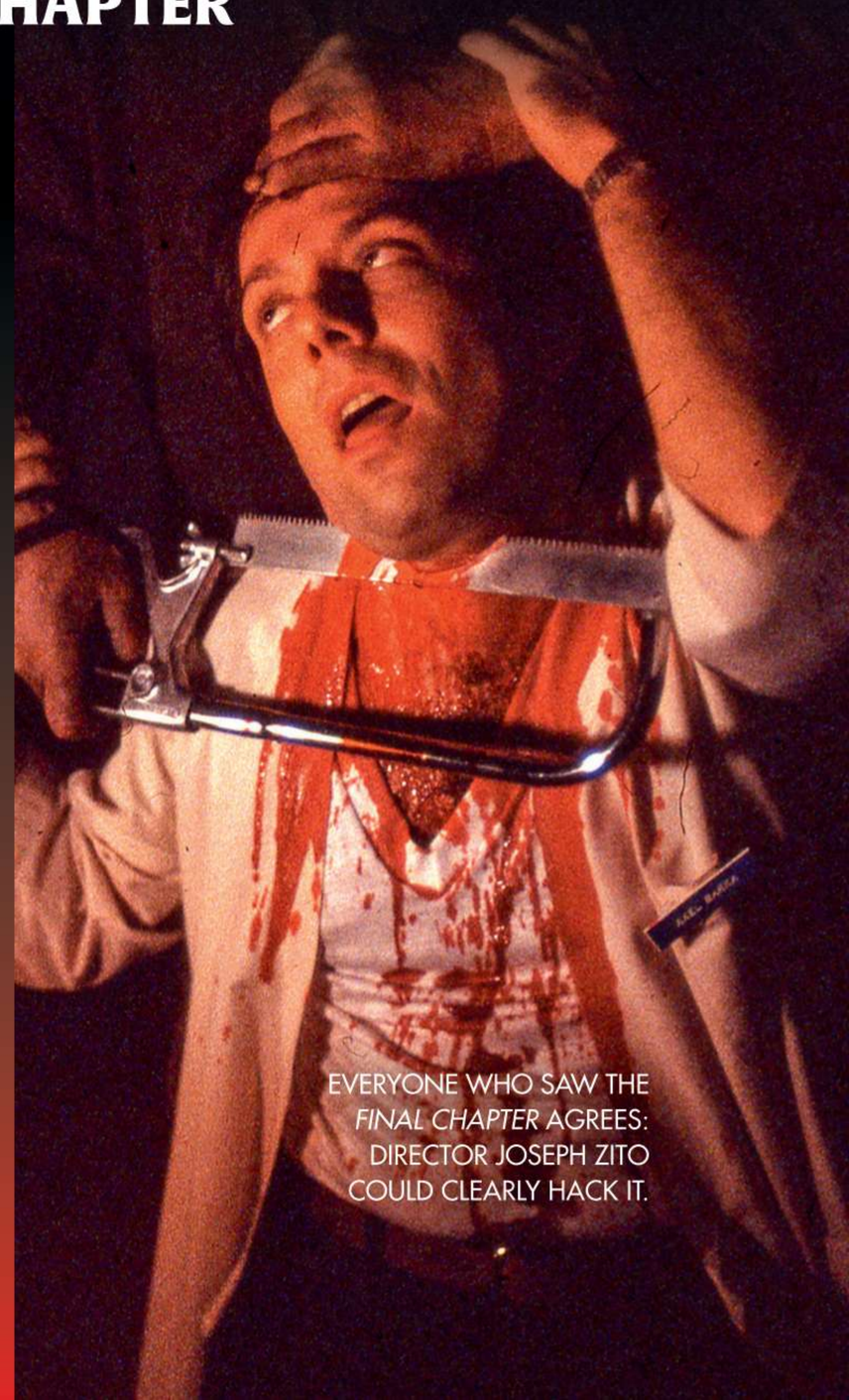
FORTY YEARS OF THE VERY MUCH NOT FINAL CHAPTER

BY BRIAN W. COLLINS

For a film that was supposed to end a franchise, FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE FINAL CHAPTER feels more like a beginning.

On April 13, 1984, *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* was released in theaters, and the series ended. For the past forty years, hardcore horror fans have lamented that there weren't more entries in the franchise, while casual viewers barely even recall this quartet of slasher films about some occasional mass murdering in and around the town of Crystal Lake. Since its conclusion, the likes of *Leprechaun*, *Critters*, and *Silent Night, Deadly Night* have all seen their franchises run for more films, leaving Jason Voorhees a faded memory.

NOT ALL HORROR SEQUELS ARE A SUCCESS, BUT THIS ONE NAILED IT.



EVERYONE WHO SAW THE *FINAL CHAPTER* AGREES: DIRECTOR JOSEPH ZITO COULD CLEARLY HACK IT.

I kid, of course. That's merely what was supposed to happen. But as even neophyte horror fans know, the then-promised "Final Chapter" wasn't even at the halfway point for the series, and ran for another eight installments spanning the next 25 years. And it's not even really dead yet! After 2009's successful but polarizing revival, the franchise has been in limbo due to various studio politics, financial concerns (damn you, *Rings*!), and even a drawn-out lawsuit over who should own its lucrative rights. A show from Bryan Fuller is coming from Peacock, but Jason's big screen future remains questionable.

But the fact that we're even talking about another Jason adventure in the multiplexes is largely thanks to the would-be finale, which turns forty years old this year and hasn't lost an ounce of its appeal. It's that very appeal that basically forced Paramount to renege and make more movies – by all accounts (via the *Crystal Lake Memories* documentary and book, indispensable to any fan) they had every intention of actually ending the profitable series after four movies. Producer Frank Mancuso Jr. was worried that making more of them would keep him from being taken seriously by the studios, and Paramount – who never had much involvement with their productions, only the distribution – was fine to let it go since the slasher sub-genre was in decline anyway.

WE GOTTA HAND IT TO TED WHITE: HIS SPIN ON JASON IS ONE FOR THE AGES.

SLEEP... SLEEP NOW.

However, the film came out and scored the best opening weekend for the series, ultimately generating a total just under $33 million and ranking as the 26th highest grosser of the year, ahead of notable (and far more expensive) films like David Lynch's *Dune* and John Carpenter's *Starman*. Audiences may have been growing weary of masked boogeymen, but not *this particular* masked boogeyman. And thus the so-called "final chapter" had a sequel in production before you could say "Ki-Ki-Ma-Ma" and, hilariously, it was in theaters less than a year after *The Final Chapter*'s debut, offering the shortest gap between entries then or since. It's like they weren't even really trying to make us believe we'd never see that hockey mask again.

You would think that such a definitive "finale" entry would be ignored in order to keep the series going, but the exact opposite happened: it offered a high that its producers have been chasing ever since. Looking back, it's clear that what director Joseph Zito and writers Barney Cohen and Bruce Hidemi Sakow brought to the table influenced much of what was to follow. The film's young hero Tommy Jarvis returned in the next two entries (with new actors), and then *New Blood* went a step further and borrowed its entire backdrop of a woman and her teenage daughter living next door to a house that's been rented for the weekend by a group of horny college kids. 1993's *Jason Goes To Hell* even tried to once again finish the series, offering its second "Final" in a subtitle ("*The Final Friday*") when neither of them were the actual final entries.

TED WHITE'S TAKE ON JASON SET A HIGH BAR FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOWED, WHILE JOSEPH ZITO'S DIRECTION FOUND TIME FOR SUSPENSE DESPITE THE HIGHER BODY COUNT. IT'S EASILY THE SCARIEST SEQUEL.

Then in 2009, when it came time for the inevitable reboot, Platinum Dunes clearly wanted to remake part 4 more than part 1. After racing through the "Mrs. Voorhees" part of the story (seriously, the flashback that opens *Part 2* might run longer) and throwing in about fifteen minutes' worth of sackhead Jason, they go right into *Final Chapter* territory, with yet another group of horny college kids visiting a cabin near Crystal Lake, including a dorky one with some serious sexual hangups à la Crispin Glover's Jimmy. Jared Padelecki as hero Clay was more or less a stand-in for Rob Dier from *Final Chapter*, as both men are ruggedly handsome "Jason Hunters" who have come to the area on behalf of their sister (revenge in Rob's case; Clay is just hoping to find his), a mission so important they both rebuke the clear romantic interest from the movies' respective female leads. In a film that very much created its own branch of mythos for Jason (the tunnels, the kidnapping, etc.), you can almost sense someone was making sure that they never veered too far off course, using *Final Chapter* as a beacon of sorts to keep them on the right path.

And why wouldn't they? It's easy to see why it's the fan favorite. The kids are likable but not so much that you're devastated when they die, a mark a number of the later films missed. It even weirdly skews the "If you have sex, you die" trope, as poor Paul and his speared groin might have been OK (or at least, survived longer) had he continued flirting with the girl inside instead of running after his angry girlfriend to apologize. The MPAA also seemed to appreciate Tom Savini's return to "finish what he started"; while still trimming some of his magic tricks, they were nowhere near as vicious as they'd be with most other installments. But it wasn't all just blood and guts; Ted White's take on Jason set a high bar for those who followed, while Joseph Zito's direction found time for suspense despite the higher body count. It's easily the scariest sequel.

As a result of all that extra bit of care, it's the rare sequel that horror fans won't get mad at you for ranking over the original, even more impressive considering it's the *fourth* entry in the franchise. Only the bravest fans would try to claim *Hellraiser: Bloodline* or *Texas Chainsaw: The Next Generation* outshined their landmark originals, but with *Friday* it's pretty common to see *Final Chapter* at the top. It's almost more like a TV show in that it needed to find its footing with a few "episodes" before everything really clicked into place. With all due respect to Pamela Voorhees, if you say "Friday the 13th" to someone, they are going to conjure an image of a guy in a hockey mask. Well, the hockey mask didn't appear in the first two films, and Jason only wears it for the final third of *Part 3. Final Chapter* was, ironically, the first full-blown Jason movie, offering the ultimate culmination of everything that worked about the first three films and adding its own perks for good measure.

So in a weird way, the movie was a colossal failure. It was supposed to kill the series off, but instead it turned out so good that it gave the franchise a new lease on life, one that continues forty years later. Even looking beyond the direct sequels (to, for instance, the video game, the *Never Hike Alone* fan films, *Freddy vs Jason*...) it's safe to assume none of them would exist if *Final Chapter* had an honest title. You had one job, *Final Chapter*, and you blew it. And may we never stop thanking you. 💀

GIRL, ARE YOU MA? BECAUSE I SURE WANT TO KI-KI-KI YOU.

DEAD RIGHT CO-HOSTS REBEKAH MCKENDRY, JARED RIVET, AND SEVERAL DOZEN OF THEIR CLOSEST FRIENDS.

A DECADE OF

BY REBEKAH McKENDRY

1. **In Shyamalan's *The Visit*, an uncomfortable trip to their grandparents comes to a head when the children are forced to play what board game?**

2. **In 1977's *Suspiria*, what flower marks the entrance to the witch Helena Markos's lair?**

3. **In 2001's *Joy Ride*, what is the CB handle of Ted Levine's barely-seen psychotic truck driver?**

REBEKAH AND JUMPCUT CAFE OWNER ELRIC KANE.

These are just a few sample questions from our monthly Los Angeles horror trivia event, Dead Right Horror Trivia Night, now celebrating our 10th anniversary! Every month, L.A. horror fans have gathered to fight for the right to be called the ultimate horror fan… and win awesome prizes, too. Regular players include a list of horror industry directors, writers, actors, and icons. Guest hosts have included legends like Stuart Gordon, Simon Barrett, and Tom Holland.

JARED MAKES THE CROWD EARN THEIR PRIZES.

FANGO'S BRIAN W. COLLINS MODELS THE SCREEN-USED *VALENTINE* MASK HE WON AT DEAD RIGHT.

DRHTN was born at Jumpcut Café in Studio City, owned by my *Colors of the Dark* co-host, Elric Kane. Elric was looking for events the café could host, and I had just moved to L.A. from NYC where I'd been a regular attendee at several general knowledge pub trivia nights. I thought it might be fun to host my own.

But in truth, I was never great at general knowledge trivia. I would just sip my beer and take wild guesses. The only area where I could hold my own was movie trivia, specifically horror. I recommended a horror trivia night to Elric. I asked friend Ryan Turek (then editor-in-chief of horror website *Shock Till You Drop*) if he might be interested in co-hosting. We combined forces and began crafting out the first DRHTN.

By the time the event rolled around, we questioned how many people would actually show up. But then we opened the doors and people started arriving. And more people. And before we knew it, the line wrapped around the block. We realized that not only was this bigger than we imagined, but also that we weren't alone. The city was filled with horror nerds, all ready to join us in brain-melting trivia.

Over the last ten years, we have hosted a show every month, with the exception of the pandemic when we transitioned online via Twitch. After Jumpcut closed its doors, we moved to Blast from the Past in Burbank. Turek had to bow out to produce films like *The Black Phone* (Blumhouse Productions), but Jared Rivet quickly joined as co-host.

Each DRHT game has about six rounds, varying between very broad categories (like '90s slashers) to very specific categories (like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). "I often do rounds based on a new movie coming out that's part of a popular subgenre, or tributes to horror celebs if they've passed," says Rivet. "And then sometimes you just get wacky ideas like 'The Vincent Price Dead Wife Round' or 'Full Moon, Trimark or Concorde?'"

The players are in teams of four to six players with a mix of different horror tastes and skill levels. Even the most hardened know-it-all *Friday the 13th* fan may be totally clueless when it comes to *Goosebumps* books, so the group method ensures strong chance of doing well. As monthly player and horror writer Brain Collins says, "There aren't a lot of varsity all-star players in that room. It's a fun way to get [the] thrill of a victory, but with something we all love dearly." Andrew Kasch (*DC's Legends of Tomorrow*) has a similar sentiment: "When you win, it feels like you've just won a triathlon. Plus, it feels good to put all this endless nerd knowledge to some sort of use, even if it's just winning DVD copies of *Cathy's Curse*!"

If there is one thing horror fans like to do just as much as watch horror movies, it's argue about them! We've even had to reach out to writers and filmmakers themselves to solve

AS A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, YOU BET YOUR ASS REBEKAH TAKES POINTS OFF FOR MISSPELLINGS. (WELL, MAYBE SHE JUST JUDGES YOU SILENTLY.)

FRIGHT NIGHT AT DEAD RIGHT: SPECIAL GUEST TOM HOLLAND HOSTS A ROUND.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GARO SETIAN, JARED RIVET, REBEKAH MCKENDRY & BRIAN W. COLLINS

disputes. Years ago, we asked:"In *Jaws*, when Michael Brody is in the hospital, his mom asks if she can bring him anything from home and if he wants ice cream. He responds that he wants his toy cars and what else?" Michael responds with COFFEE; half of our players assumed he meant the drink, and the other half believed he meant coffee flavored ice cream. Total chaos broke out, and no amount of googling could find a definitive answer. The argument raged on for months before regular player (and film producer) Buz Wallick reached out to *Jaws* screenwriter Carl Gottlieb. What was Michael requesting?? Coffee flavored ice cream, which was quite popular during the mid-1970s in the Northeast.

Looking back over the last ten years, I've realized that something more has happened at our events than just mental aneurysms over which *Saw* film features the shotgun carousel (it's *6*, btw). Friendships were born. Tight-knit social groups were created. And a few films even got made through the networks and connections first forged at our Dead Right events. "Once I started going to DRHTN, I started really finding my people in the L.A. horror scene," says Alison Star Locke, writer and director of *The Apology*. "You'll go to trivia, then work with some of the same folks, read each other's scripts. It's so empowering and joyful and I'm forever grateful for it." Adds Dick Grunert (*Adventure Time*, *Craig of the Creek*), "DHRTN really is one of my favorite things to do every month. If I'm having a down day, it's always a great pick-me-up. It's honestly the one place in LA where I feel like I fit in."

I've also pondered why trivia is so important to horror fans. Why does the minutiae of movies matter so much to us? The best answer I've been able to come up with is: pure love. We LOVE horror movies. And when you love something, you want to learn everything about it. "Growing up a movie nut already puts you at the nerd table, and then loving horror movies somehow makes you weird even amongst the weirdos," says Josh Miller, writer of *Violent Night*. "Someone will bend your ear with deep thoughts on Tarkovsky and then look at you like a goon because you know how many *Leprechaun* movies there are. So getting in a room with people who not only know as much about horror movies as you, but MORE — it is a good feeling."

Expanding on this, Jared Rivet says," I think a lot of us like to marinate in these movies, live in them, absorb every detail. So when you're asked a question about what the bumper sticker says on the truck that almost runs the Delta 88 off the road in *The Evil Dead*, it's probably in there somewhere, but can you reach into your brain and find it under pressure? (It's Lazy Mary.) And over the last ten years I've watched our horror community grow. I've seen hardcore horror hounds in Los Angeles choke during tie-breaker questions they should know the answers to, and I've watched shy introverts hiding in the back of the room come from out of nowhere and topple Goliaths. But seeing people become friends and collaborators... and then getting to publicly celebrate the successes of our players... over the years has been the most rewarding part of it."

How can you try your hand at surviving Dead Right Horror Trivia? We often take the show to a variety of film festivals and conventions across the country. You can always check our Facebook page to see where we are going to be. If you happen to be in Los Angeles, please join us for one of our regular games. No team necessary! We will find a group that will be happy to have your delicious horror brain! 💀

Oh, and your answers:

1. Yahtzee
2. A blue iris
3. Rusty Nail

WINNING PLAYERS SHOW OFF THAT BOOTY.

ACTOR DAVID DASTMALCHIAN (*LATE NIGHT WITH THE DEVIL*) AND DIRECTOR CORIN HARDY (*THE NUN*) POP IN.

Maternal Misgivings

FROM AMBIVALENT TO MONSTROUS MOTHERS IN HORROR

As we near Mother's Day, it's a good time to explore the role of the matriarch in the genre.

By Jenika McCrayer

“Do you want children?”

“When are you and your husband having kids?”

“Don’t you think it’s time to settle down and start a family?”

“What are you going to do without kids?”

Everyone seems mindful of my clock. My 80-year-old neighbor convinced that my hypothetical biracial children would heal a deeply divided nation, my hairdresser watching my gray strands multiply, my friends already planning future playdates – these are just a few of the swarms of people compelled to tell me that my biological clock will eventually stop ticking. I can’t even leave the damn house without someone commenting on the absence of tiny tots trailing behind me.

And now that I’m in my thirties, the topic of children is brought up with even more urgency. When the subject eventually comes up – and it always comes up – some people are polite and emphasize “*if*.” They start with, “Well, *if* you have children,” and then proceed to say the same things everyone says about children regardless of *if* and when you have them. But all the unsolicited commentary on childrearing more or less boils down to: “It’s worth it.”

But is it? I’m constantly reminded of my duty to reproduce, but is it something I would find worthwhile? Am I worthless without children? These questions haunt me regularly, but what actually keeps me up at night is the fear of replicating my mom’s mistakes. There is a non-zero chance that I will irrevocably fuck up a human being I made. It’s honestly no wonder that so many horror films have been fueled by the concept of motherhood and the trauma of giving birth.

LIKE CARRIE, I FELT LIKE MOM OFTEN STOOD IN THE WAY OF MY GOOD TIME.

My mom is to thank or blame for my horror obsession. Mom loved spooky shit. Growing up, she would send my older sister and me to the local video store for the latest fright. While I may have seen the “classics” a little too early, these are memories I hold close to my heart when remembering her.

I wish I could say my mom and I were always close, but at the time of her death, our relationship seemed broken beyond repair. I’d been so angry with her for so long, and we always seemed at odds. But in the months after her death, I have been drawn to our old favorite horror movies, wishing she could still watch them with me. Revisiting these films, I've noticed similarities between our often tumultuous dynamic and the mother/daughter relationships on screen.

Our relationship was complicated, and at times, I would have said she was a textbook Monstrous Mother. Simply put, these mothers are depicted as villainous, and they are often one of the central antagonists to their children.

There were times when my mom felt like an antagonist in my life. I wouldn’t consider her as bad as Margaret White (the superb Piper Laurie) in our favorite movie, Brian De Palma’s *Carrie*, but she was as quick to criticize my choices. She made her opinions known and had a lot of sharp edges. Mom was hurtful in the ways most mothers are cruel toward their adolescent and teen daughters. Whether it was the hormonal breakouts (“The Lord’s way of chastising,” as Margaret White quipped) or a doomed crush, my mom was there to point it out. Like Carrie, I felt like Mom often stood in the way of my good time. She worried endlessly about raising a child she sometimes deemed too soft to handle the cruelties of “the real world.” They’re all going to laugh at you, indeed.

The Others (Alejandro Amenábar) was another favorite of ours. If I were to

THE LATE, GREAT PIPER LAURIE (RIGHT, WITH SISSY SPACEK) TYPIFIED THE NIGHTMARE MOM IN BRIAN DE PALMA’S *CARRIE*.

describe *The Others* from Grace (Nicole Kidman)'s point of view, it's a gothic tale of a woman trapped in her house with her two needy children. It's 1945, her husband has yet to return from war, and her children Anne (Alakina Mann) and Nicholas (James Bentley) are allergic to light. That means that until the domestic help and "ghosts" showed up, Grace spent most of her days alone in a dark house on the isolated Channel Island, Jersey.

In a twist, we learn that Grace has committed the ultimate sin of murdering her children. Thankfully, most of the movie went over my head when we first saw it, but I could tell it upset my mom deeply. I remember waking up in the middle of the night to find her in the kitchen, staring at the cabinets.

Despite this, it became a comfort film for both of us. I was around the same age as Anne when the movie was released, and I related to her a lot. Like Grace and Anne, my mom and I were two sides of the same coin – stubborn, at times inflexible, unyielding toward each other. The last few years felt like a cold war, the tension between my mom and me as thick as the impenetrable fog surrounding Grace's estate.

Still, Grace gets even more of my sympathy the older I get. Are we to assume that Grace is a monster for what she did when she reached her breaking point?

Margaret and Grace can both be viewed as monstrous mothers, but as I get older, I welcome their honesty. I hear echoes of my mom's laments in their stories. Grace vows not to squander what she interprets as a second chance to be the mother she wishes to be, and she and Margaret both eventually take responsibility for the monsters of their own creation. They didn't shy away from the horror of their lives, which in turn gave me and other women the right to be able to stop and think about the decision to have children – a right to choose.

Grace and Margaret were honest about the sacrifices they made. Children put a strain on their marriages and their sanity. It was a sensationalized portrayal of motherhood, sure, but it gave rise to a more nuanced motherhood trope, the ambivalent mother. It's exactly what it sounds like: women who are ambivalent toward motherhood or are unsure if they want to be a mom. The pandemic has made it clear just how many sacrifices moms have made and continue to make, and the downfall of Roe v. Wade has also made the "choice" of motherhood a more loaded conversation. Unfortunately, it's still revolutionary for a woman to doubt whether she wants to assume the immense responsibility of motherhood.

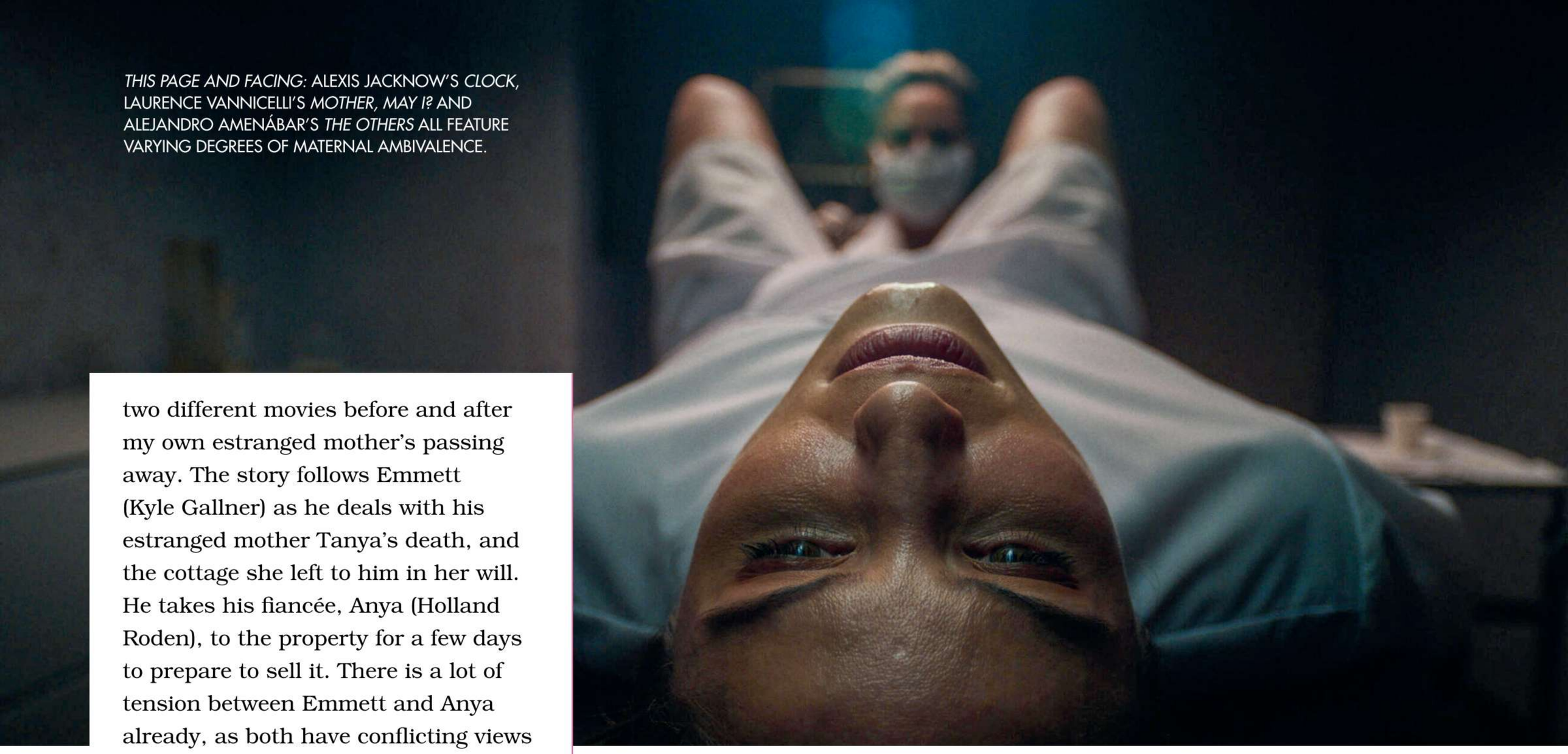
Clock, *Huesera: The Bone Woman*, and *Mother, May I?* all tackle the weight of this choice, offering realistic portrayals of how much women are expected to sacrifice to become mothers. I view Alexis Jacknow's *Clock* as the consequence of trying to fix something that ain't broke. Ella (Dianna Agron) has an idyllic life as an interior designer and wife to surgeon Aidan (Jay Ali). But her child-free life comes under more scrutiny as she approaches 40. Her father, Joseph (Saul Rubinek), is especially grating because in almost every one of his scenes, he attempts to guilt-trip Ella into having children and continuing their Jewish legacy. (Admittedly, this is something I am also self-conscious about. How many Bermudians do you know? Exactly!)

Ella decides to enroll in a clinical study to fix her broken clock. The maternal Dr. Webber (Nikita Patel) waxes poetic about how the desire for motherhood is a woman's natural state of being, and she is determined to "fix" women who don't have this "innate" desire.

Huesera, directed by Michelle Garza Cervera, also challenges the heteronormative notion that every woman has a desire for children. Valeria (Natalia Solián) is a chic carpenter with a rebellious past attempting to play house with her less-cool husband, Raúl (Alfonso Dosal). Raúl is anxiously awaiting the arrival of their daughter, but Valeria feels she is cursed by a malevolent spirit, a woman with broken limbs. Motherhood also seems to be at odds with Valeria's queer and punk identities. Her entire family is quick to point out her awkwardness around children and how unnatural it is for, as her sister cruelly puts it, "people like her" to have children.

LIKE GRACE AND ANNE, MY MOM AND I WERE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN – STUBBORN, AT TIMES INFLEXIBLE, UNYIELDING TOWARD EACH OTHER.

Mother, May I?, out last year from Laurence Vannicelli, felt like



THIS PAGE AND FACING: ALEXIS JACKNOW'S *CLOCK*, LAURENCE VANNICELLI'S *MOTHER, MAY I?* AND ALEJANDRO AMENÁBAR'S *THE OTHERS* ALL FEATURE VARYING DEGREES OF MATERNAL AMBIVALENCE.

two different movies before and after my own estranged mother's passing away. The story follows Emmett (Kyle Gallner) as he deals with his estranged mother Tanya's death, and the cottage she left to him in her will. He takes his fiancée, Anya (Holland Roden), to the property for a few days to prepare to sell it. There is a lot of tension between Emmett and Anya already, as both have conflicting views on starting a family. Emmett views Anya's prioritizing her burgeoning writing career as a fear of motherhood, whereas Anya knows that starting a family with Emmett won't heal his past trauma with his mother.

The couple decides to take shrooms one night, and the following day, Anya starts to behave strangely. Anya begins wearing Tanya's clothes and makeup, takes on her mannerisms, and tries to be the kind of mother Emmett needed when he was younger. It's deliberately unclear if Anya is roleplaying in a poor attempt to get Emmett to open up, or if Tanya genuinely possesses her, and either way, the result is unsettling.

At first watch, I immediately related to Emmett. I had lost my mother years ago when I simply couldn't take her cruelty anymore. I had become used to the silence, but after she died, it became heavier, deafening.

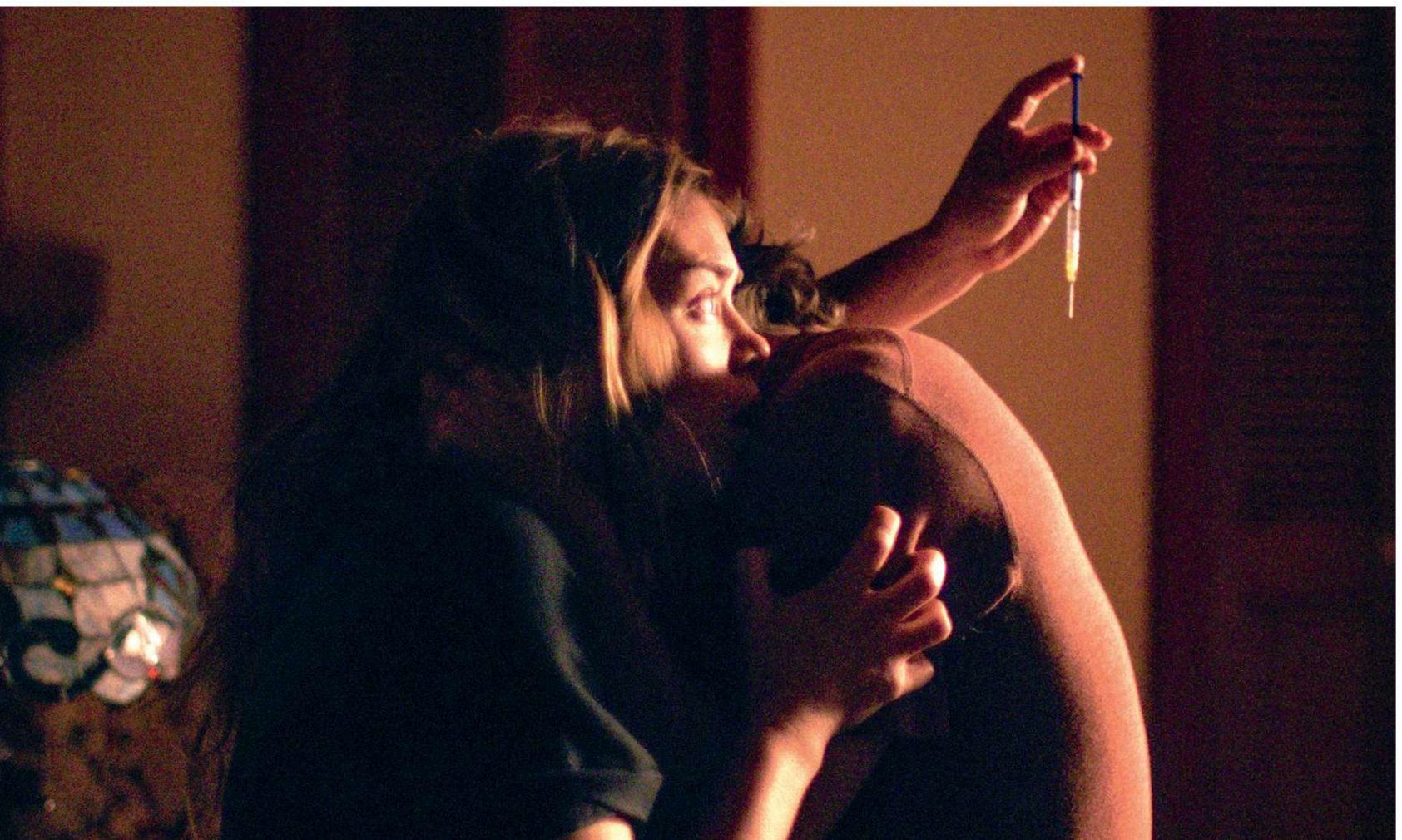
On the second watch, I was drawn more to Anya. Roden steals the show by vacillating between an estranged mother trying to make amends with her adult son and a fiancée ambivalent toward motherhood and domesticity.

I wish my mom were still here to see these more recent films with me, and I wonder if she would agree that horror has softened its approach to mothers. But is it the films that have more empathy toward these mothers, or am I finally at an age where I can empathize with these characters and my own mother? Yes, I see the ugliest sides of my mom in Grace and in Margaret. But I can see how they paved the way for Ella, Valeria, and Anya. I can see how I not only inherited my mom's sharp edges, but how I can use them to carve out a life that I want, with or without children.

Both ambivalent and monstrous mother tropes honor the complexity of motherhood that my mom always shared, but I couldn't appreciate this until now. She sacrificed a lot for me – a new country, the drudgery of homemaking, the expectation that she care for all of the children in our giant family alongside her own.

Ambivalent motherhood depictions in film are refreshingly honest about the expectation of women to be entirely fulfilled by having children. Ella and Valeria are pressured into growing their families and giving up parts of themselves to make room. Ella's life is literally drained of color after she attempts to rewire her brain. Valeria must turn her beloved workshop into her daughter's nursery, and Emmett constantly pressures Anya to start a family in his desperate attempt to fill a void left behind by his mother.

Grief is contradictory; I spent a lot of time being angry with my mom, and there are things I could never forgive her for, but now I wish I had the opportunity to watch these films with her and to talk to her as a grown woman about what it's like to be a mother. There were times when my mom leaned toward monstrosity, but as I get older and contemplate what it means to have a baby-shaped hole in my life, I'm desperate for her opinion. Mostly, I wish she were here to tell me to stop crying. I wish I could tell her I forgive her, and to thank her for making me who I am. 💀



IMAGINARY

BY DANE DILIEGRO

Fango met actor and creature performer Dane DiLiegro at Texas Frightmare Weekend last year, and he quickly became part of our extended family. His work as the Predator in *Prey* speaks for itself, and his latest gig finds him bringing the nightmarish Chauncey to life in *Imaginary*. We asked Dane to walk us through some behind-the-scenes moments from the Blumhouse film.

Here's me with director Jeff Wadlow. He's like a pro athlete of a director; he moves quickly, he knows what he wants, and you keep up or get left behind. As a former basketball player, I lined up very much with his ideology.

This is the first scene I shot in New Orleans. They'd lift me up through the floor with a crane so I could burst out of the presents and attack Jessica (DeWanda Wise). Even inside the suit, I could tell this scene was gonna be terrifying.

This suit was a breeze to wear compared to some others, significantly lighter. But shooting in New Orleans, with that humidity, I'd sit down between takes and there'd be a puddle of sweat at my feet.

Betty Buckley: what a queen. You could feel her legendary status radiating off her. She has this monologue in the film that they gave her like a half hour beforehand, and she absolutely crushed it. I was honored to kill her.

To become Chauncey, I trained for six weeks on all fours with weighted vests, pulling sleds. This scene (top left) was the most fun, because Jeff let me go wild and do my own thing. The suit was supervised by Richard Landon at Spectral Motion. (Richard worked on the original *Predator*!)

Pyper Braun (left) is a ball of energy and Taegen Burns (right) is an incredible actress. They're both gonna be huge stars. Taegen and I bonded over discontinued digital cameras on set (check out @justblamedane on IG for my discontinued camera obsession!).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIONSGATE & DANE DILIEGRO | PHOTOGRAPHY BY PARRISH LEWIS

BRAY WYATT, WINDHAM AND ME

A MAKEUP FX ARTIST AND WRESTLING SUPERFAN RECALLS HIS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LATE WWE SUPERSTAR.

BY JASON BAKER

When I was growing up, the only way to see any behind-the-scenes photos of anything horror-related was through the pages of FANGORIA. Like many others, I'd get kicked out of the local bookstore for spending hours at the magazine rack without ever buying an issue. But before security came, I got to see the masters at work: Stan Winston, Rick Baker, Rob Bottin, Greg Nicotero, Howard Berger, and of course, Tom Savini. I was blown away by these photos of pure wizardry. I'd dream about creating something just as iconic one day. Something that the world had never seen. Something truly horrifying and unique. My dream eventually came true — not for film or television, but in the world of Sports Entertainment.

In 2012 I started working with Tom Savini, and over time he started trusting me with more and more responsibilities within his FX company, allowing him to focus on his acting career. One client that I was responsible for was World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Soon I was spearheading projects with wrestlers, getting to work with amazing talent like Erick Rowan, Braun Strowman, Alexa Bliss, and Luke Harper. In 2013, I met Windham Rotunda, better known as WWE Superstar Bray Wyatt. We hit it off over our mutual love of horror movies, music, and art. For years Windham would say, "Let's collaborate on something. I'll give you a call later this week to talk about it."

"Later this week" finally came in late 2018. "Hoot! I need your help. I want to create a new character, like nothing that's ever been done before." At the time Windham had been sent home because there was no storyline for him, his contract was almost up, and no one was talking about renewing. In the world of wrestling, he was practically out the door.

On top of that, Windham had vouched for me to the higher-ups (no pressure). And if I messed up Savini's relationship with WWE, they'd never find my body! It was do or die for both of us.

We started to talk, figuring out what we wanted to accomplish. Despite the horror trappings of his new character, the Fiend, Windham never wanted to be perceived as a cheap knock-off of the Undertaker. So, our mindset was thus: If the Undertaker is the Universal Classic Monster of WWE, then the Fiend would be its slasher. And every good slasher needs a mask.

When creating the mask and the character, we really tried to double down on the horror elements and push the boundaries of what was allowed on WWE at the time. Something that could play on the silver screen as well as the squared circle. We did too good of a job on the original, and were asked to create a second mask, with some of the scare factor dialed back. With the amazing talent of writer Nick Manfredini, the three of us created the *Firefly Funhouse*, a twisted take on classic children's shows, drawing inspiration from *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, *Mr. Dressup* and everything in-between. The idea was that the funhouse was Bray Wyatt's personal hell, and the only way to escape this hell was as Bray's new character, The Fiend: a murderous, blood hungry monster with no remorse. We built the original set at my home base in Pittsburgh, with the first segments being shot here as well. Being able to direct

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JASON BAKER

THE AUTHOR HELPS WYATT GET INTO CHARACTER.

UNMASKED: BRAY WYATT AND HIS ALTER EGO, THE FIEND (IN REALITY, THE AUTHOR SUBBING FOR HIS PAL).

my best friend, watching what we'd created together come to life before my eyes, is something I'll tell my grandchildren about.

It wasn't long before the rest of the world got to see this transformation. When he premiered in 2019, the Fiend was the biggest thing in professional wrestling. I had no clue that my work would receive this kind of response. So many people reached out to tell me how they hadn't watched wrestling in years, but had fallen back in love with it, all because of the work Windham, Nick, and I were doing.

Because things didn't stop with the mask, The Fiend allowed me to bring the world of SFX make-up into the world of Sports Entertainment. From doing amazing make-up effects on other Superstars to performing live gags for an arena packed with 80,000 screaming fans, the work I did with WWE was truly like nothing I'd ever done before. So yeah, my dream came true. I created an iconic monster, one that can be seen in magazines, on t-shirts, in stunning fan art and incredible tattoos. And on top of all that, I created it with Windham, someone I consider family.

In 2021, Windham was released from WWE. In 2022 he was rehired, and the call came in again. "I'm coming back, and I don't want to do the Fiend." So, we created Uncle Howdy, and a character nicknamed Sixx for the 2023 Royal Rumble.

In February, Windham contracted COVID, which led to several health issues, forcing him to step away from the ring for a while. During his recovery we talked about what was next, and he was ready to bring back the Fiend. So, we got back to work. We started concept sketches and throwing around ideas. We had the new lantern and mask done and we were discussing ideas for his wrestling gear. He was so excited to get back in the ring and give the fans this new iteration of the character.

On August 24, 2023, I received the worst phone call I've ever experienced from Windham's wife, JoJo. My best friend was gone. I'm not overexaggerating when I say I've never known true sorrow until that moment. How could this giant of a human whom I had seen run miles, lift humans above his head, and be an inspiration to everyone he'd ever met, whom I had talked to days earlier, just be gone? I don't think I'll ever understand it.

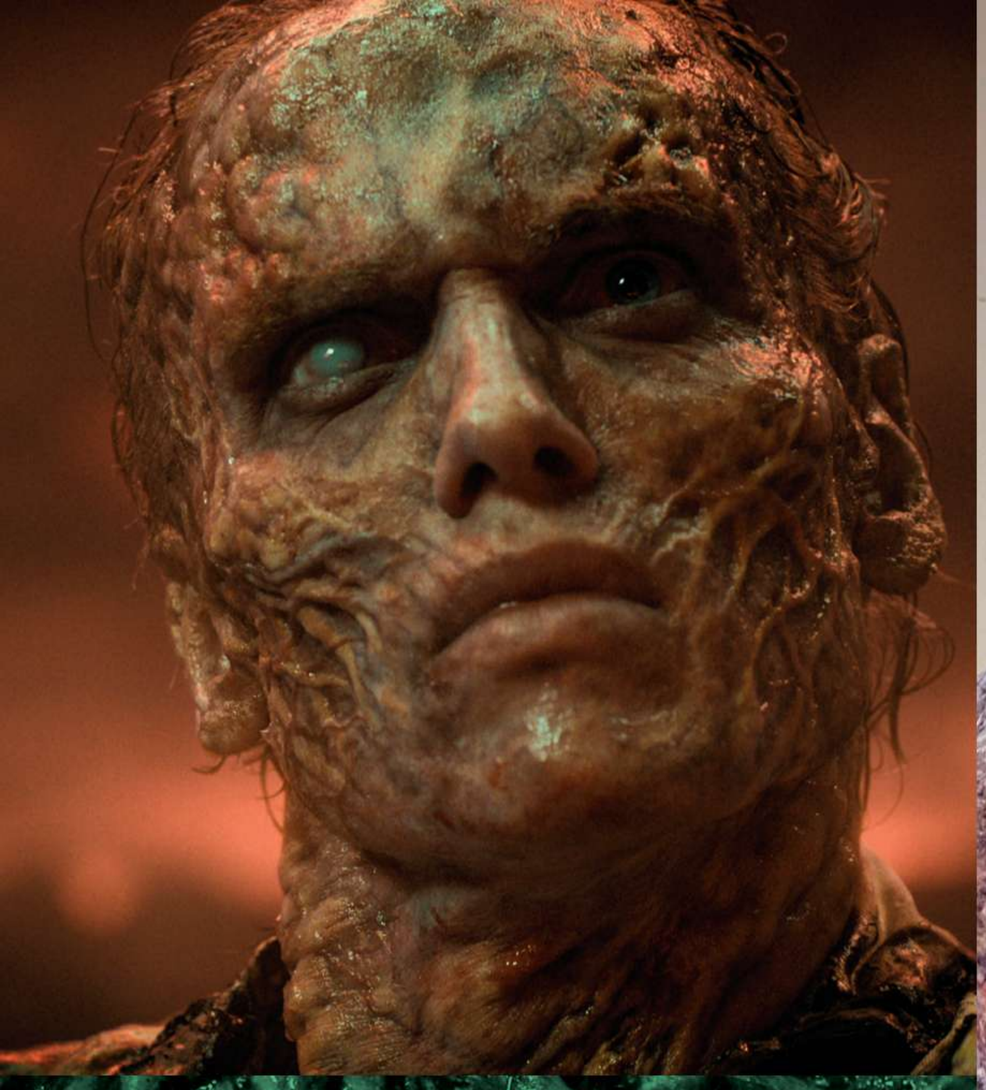
But with Windham, every time you think you've got the answer, he'd change the question. His character Bray would always say, "You can't kill it." Who knew how right he was…

Out of nowhere, I received a call from Steve Conoscenti at WWE documentaries. They were gearing up to do a doc on Windham entitled *BRAY WYATT: Becoming Immortal*, premiering on Peacock April 1, 2024. We got to talking, and I told him about how we were almost done with the new Fiend costume. Immediately, we both had the same idea: let's give his fans his last creation to finish the fight! Let's complete it and film the process. I reached out to his wife and family to have them give their input into what they think Windham would want, something Windham would have loved.

You'll have to tune in for the rest, but suffice it to say that not even death can stop Bray Wyatt and the Fiend.

The fact that I have the honor of giving the world of sports entertainment one of their most cherished characters back is not lost upon me. This project has truly been a rollercoaster of emotions, but I can't think of a better way to honor a man, someone I considered a brother, than with this amazing tribute. Thanks to everyone involved: My amazing crew at Callosum Studios, the entire Rotunda Family, Jojo Offerman, Steve & the doc crew at WWE/Peacock, Mook and Julie from WWE creative, HHH, and my amazing wife Mandy for being my emotional rock through all of this. And most importantly, thanks to all of you beautiful Fireflies out there who light the way!

All that's left to do is – LET HIM IN! 💀



By Ve Neill

BARRIE GOWER, The Early Days

Our makeup effects field correspondent speaks with the award-winning artist about his time working on THE WOLFMAN, GAME OF THRONES and more.

Barrie Gower has amassed a whopping 21 various nominations throughout his career. Among them are four BAFTA (British Academy Film Awards) nods and two wins, and nine Emmy noms, of which he clinched five. There doesn't seem to be an end in sight for this extremely talented artist.

Barrie had an early start down the path that ended in becoming a makeup artist. "When I grew up in the north of England my father was the manager of the local cinema, so every weekend I would go to work with my dad. This is round about when *Star Wars* first came out. There were *Star Wars* figures in the cabinets, and we would go to press screenings. I was introduced to film very early and was a huge fan. When my father passed away my mum and I moved to the middle of England, and on Sundays we would visit his aunt for Sunday lunch. I was about 11 or 12 at the time. There was a local video shop and we would hire video nasties like *Dawn of the Dead*, *American Werewolf in London*, *Evil Dead* and all those types of films of the '80s. That's when I really started getting into makeup effects."

Barrie was lucky in that sense. He had people around him to help feed the need for movie magic. In his early teens, Barrie said he used to draw a lot of creatures and monsters in school. He was introduced to FANGORIA Magazine as an early teen, and regularly watched Tom Savini, Rick Baker and Dick Smith

movies. “In FANGORIA Magazine there were articles about lab tech things and how prosthetics were made. You could actually do this for a living. I lived in the middle of England, Birmingham. There were no opportunities for me to learn any of this. I thought, ‘This is a pipe dream.’”

After high school Barrie decided he need to go somewhere that could teach him the skills he wanted to learn. He tried to enroll in the London College of Fashion but there was hairdressing criteria required, and Barrie lacked in that department, so he went back home. His mother enrolled him in a school where he took hairdressing for twelve months. “I was learning how to give elderly women perms for free. I was also making masks at home. I eventually reapplied in 1996 and they saw I had been trying and took pity on me and I got in.” He learned straight makeup, beauty, hair and prosthetics over a two-year course. Directly after he graduated, he went to work for the BBC.

In 1997 he was fortunate enough to get to work on *Saving Private Ryan* with Neill Gorton and Steven Painter, with Lois Burwell as makeup designer. For several years Barrie worked freelance with some of the top makeup artists in the business. He worked on *The Wolfman* with Rick Baker and Dave Elsey. “I will ever be grateful to Rick because I had never hand-laid hair before, and he taught me how to lay the hair with direction and thin the hair, and I still use those techniques today.”

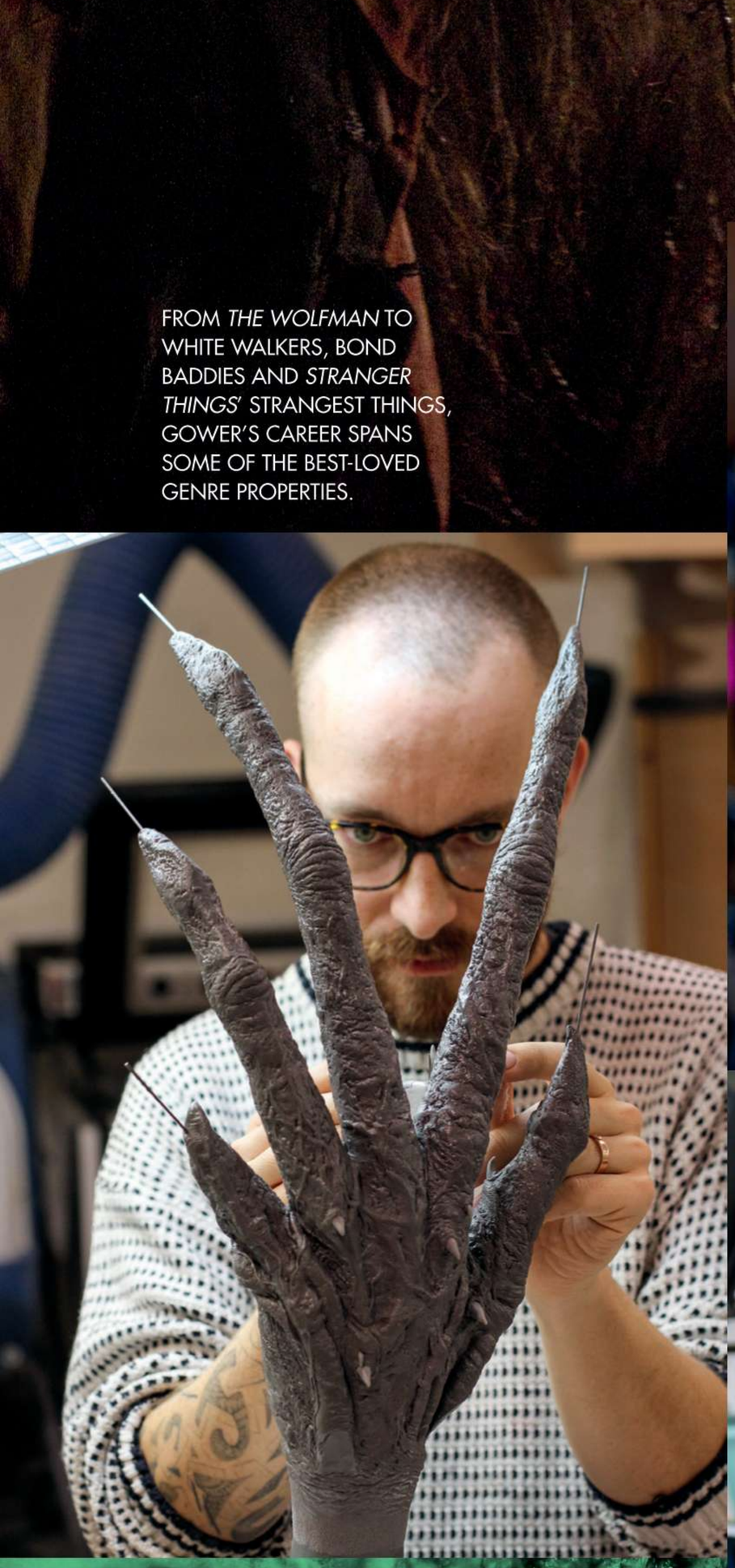
Barrie learned from other experts in the field, as well. “I had a ten-year collaboration with Nick Dudman on the *Harry Potter* films. It was an incredible experience, especially the last films. Other collaborations included Mark Coulier, David White and the company Animated Extras. I hold Mark and David responsible for everything I’ve learned, and I worked an awful lot with them. They were very generous with their knowledge.”

It was around this time that Barrie met his wife Sarah, who originally worked in visual effects and is now his co-founder of the prosthetic makeup design company BGFX. In 2010 they started a tiny shop in their garage that lasted for about three years, and then something big happened.

In 2013, Barrie and Sarah were awarded a gig on *Game of Thrones*. They worked on makeup and prosthetics from seasons four through eight. All of a sudden, their operation grew, so they moved to a much larger space to accommodate twenty artists. ”We had a tough time getting a crew together because at the same time David White was crewing up *Guardians of the Galaxy* and Mark Coulier was crewing up for *Dracula Untold*. They basically whipped out the entire British FX industry with those two projects. Somehow, I managed to get an amazing team together.” That team did five seasons over five years, and won three Emmys for their stunning work. “We got nominated every season and would always be up against *American Horror Story*, so it became a running joke between Eryn and Mike Mekash every year. The second year we went to the Emmys, we met them properly. It was funny because it’s so annoying to have your competition be so nice.”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VE NEILL & BARRIE GOWER

FROM *THE WOLFMAN* TO WHITE WALKERS, BOND BADDIES AND *STRANGER THINGS*' STRANGEST THINGS, GOWER'S CAREER SPANS SOME OF THE BEST-LOVED GENRE PROPERTIES.



Of all the different types of makeups Barrie has perfected, he has his favorites, like we all do. "Old age and character makeups. Likeness or resemblance makeups. I like changing the forms of the face. I quite enjoyed working with Rami Malek, who is a lovely man, very grateful and considerate. Patt Foad and I did a 20-piece Bondo transfer makeup for his character in the James Bond film [*No Time to Die*]. Mark Coulier, Roy Helland and myself turned Meryl Streep, who is an amazing and beautiful woman, into Margaret Thatcher for *The Iron Lady*, with a beautiful old age likeness makeup. Also, there was Taryn Egerton as Elton John [in *Rocketman*]."

Barrie, kindly, said that his favorite character makeup of all time is *Mrs. Doubtfire*, on which I was key makeup artist under Greg Cannom. That was back in the day when CGI was not utilized extensively, and the makeup had to be flawless. Now, of course, we are getting a lot of help in technical ways. Most artists are unsure of how this new technology will play out. Hopefully it will not be abused and will be used responsibly.

Barrie and his team have done an extremely wide variety of makeups. The actors he's worked with and the makeups he's created are astounding. I loved the witch makeup on Michelle Pfeiffer in the film *Stardust*. He has done horrifying burn makeups in *A Cure For Wellness* and *Chernobyl*. He transformed my friend Pam Ferris for *Harry Potter*. She played Aunt Marge who literally blows up to an enormous proportion thanks to Barrie, Mark Coulier, and many of Nick Dudman's team. Speaking of Pam, I did her makeup as The Trunchbull for the Danny DeVito film *Matilda*, and Barrie did Emma Thompson's makeup as The Trunchbull for last year's musical *Matilda*. What a coincidence!

Some other projects you might recognize of Barrie's are *Stranger Things*, *The Witcher*, *The Green Knight* and *House of Dragon*. This, of course, is not to mention the countless films he's applied makeups on. But his latest work has been on a huge HBO hit – more on that next time!

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: *Ve and Barrie get into his work on the apocalyptic HBO series* The Last Of Us.

UNBURY THE GAYS:

ASSEMBLING QUEER HORROR

A FILM GUIDE

BY SEAN ABLEY

A TEAM OF LGBTQ WRITERS REVEALS WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED IN A NEW QUEER HORROR FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRENDAN HALEY

March 31, 2015: "Hey there, so I'm in the embryonic stage of a new, big book project that I think you might be right for – I've decided I'm going to edit a giant reference book of LGBTQ horror films..."

THE AUTHOR.

Back in 2009, when I started my "Gay of the Dead" blog for Fango, "gay horror" had really started to take off. By 2015, LGBTQ content in horror was exploding, and the time felt right for a reference book on this new skew to the genre. I'd wanted to write a film encyclopedia since I was a pre-teen (I had very specific interests as a child), so without a clue as to the gargantuan amount of work the task would entail, I reached out to my writer friends to help make it happen.

An all-queer group of authors was key. The first writer I approached was Daniel W. Kelly, whose amazing *Boys, Bears & Scares* website's ever-evolving online catalog of gay horror flicks was the beginning of our master list of films. Back in 2015, that list numbered about 300 in total. Three-hundred films? We could crank that out in a snap. (This is what we call foreshadowing...)

I quickly roped in Michael Varrati (Fango contributor, filmmaker, and co-host of the *Midnight Mass* podcast), Brian Kirst (*Big Gay Horror Fan*), Alan Kelly (Irish genre journo and author of *Let Me Die a Woman!*), and Tyler Doupé (*Dread Central* staff writer), who would eventually become my co-editor. Later, Molly Henery (*The Blogging Banshee*, and creator of the "Uterus Horror" column on CertifiedForgotten.com) and Calpernia Addams (writer, actress, musician, and entertainer) would come on board when the workload started to grow exponentially.

We began scouring the internet for titles to cover. When Daniel's original list grew from 300 to 400, then 500, the completist in me went into overdrive. Instead of a book of several hundred prime examples of queer horror, why not include *all* films that had even the tiniest queer angle? (Hello, *Freddy vs. Jason*. If you know, you know...) We added short films and student films. Jesús Franco's notorious soft- (and hard-) core lesbian vampire films added almost 100 titles to the list alone. Also on the list were a surprising number of gay porn horror homages dating back to the 1970s. Considering the first exposure to loving relationships between men for many gays is pornography, I felt including films like *Sex Demon* (1975, which I wrote about in Fango V2 Issue 16) and *Gayracula* (1983, Fango V2 Issue 12) to be academically compulsory.

Our research ended with films released up through 2021 for no other reason than we just had to finish writing the manuscript. At that point, the master list included over 1,000 titles, and after making some difficult decisions, we narrowed that down to just over 900. (An Appendix in the book lists over 100 films we didn't cover because time and space didn't allow.)

As editors, Tyler and I each wrote up hundreds of films ourselves, and edited all 900+ entries. The challenge of editing my colleagues was two-fold: First, I wanted to keep their individual voices as writers. Eight different perspectives is a selling point of the book, and I didn't want to turn *Queer Horror: A Film Guide* into a single-voiced tome. The second, more labor-intensive task was watching all the films. I couldn't in good conscience write up a movie I hadn't seen, and I didn't want to take the chance of creating inaccuracies when swapping out a word or phrase or cutting an entry for length while editing the full manuscript. So... I watched 900+ horror movies. (The one exception to this was John Waters' *Eat Your Makeup*, which isn't available anywhere except for rare screenings. Calpernia wrote it up based on thorough research.)

Watching that many films, even from a genre you love, is a challenge. But what truly kept this project from feeling like homework was the absolute joy of discovering those rare, under-appreciated gems and living in their creators' world for an hour or two. I would never have found what is now one of my favorite films of all time without the countless hours spent researching this book. *Contracorriente* (*Undertow*, 2009) is a beautiful, heartbreaking ghost story of two lovers in a small, seaside Peruvian village. I can't recommend it highly enough (but definitely bring the Kleenex.) Other unique finds include *Dolly Deadly* (2016), an absolutely bonkers microbudget crossdressing revenge film by Heidi Moore (whose young son Justin plays the titular killer); *So Vam* (2021), the creation of trans Australian teenager Alice Maio Mackay, who is currently blowing up as a filmmaker; and *Dead* (2020), the most charming film about gay murder you'll ever see courtesy of the New Zealand team of Tom Sainsbury and Hayden J. Weal.

Looking back on the process of putting our book together, what strikes me most is how many films and how far back into cinema history LGBTQ folks appear. We have movies in this book from almost every era of cinema. "Queer horror" is currently trending, and we're more in charge of how we're portrayed and who tells our stories in our beloved genre than ever before, which rocks. But just as a reminder, for ourselves and the haters – even if our portrayals were less than optimal, there are at least 900+ pieces of evidence in *Queer Horror: A Film Guide* that we've been here all along. 💀

Tony Timpone's

ELEGIES

DANIELLE BISUTTI, DON MANCINI, CHANTAL QUESNELLE, FIONA DOURIF AND THE AUTHOR AT FANTASIA'S *CURSE OF CHUCKY* PREMIERE.

FANTASIA FEST FUN

After FANGORIA, my second longest career association has been with Montreal's Fantasia Film Festival. The fest opens its 28th edition this year, starting July 18th through August 4th, and it remains the genre event that all others are compared to.

For 23 of those 28 editions, I served as Fantasia's Co-Director of International Programming. Almost as long as my Fango run! Montreal became a second home during that decades-spanning stint.

FANGORIA and Fantasia have also enjoyed a lengthy association. The two have done co-sponsorships and ad swaps, and Fantasia has welcomed the mag's editorial team to serve on its juries and report on its festivities. While I anxiously await announcements of Fantasia's 2024 lineup (I parted ways with the fest in 2021), memories of many past festival frolics keep flooding back. So, allow me to share my Top 25 Fantasia Moments.

1. Fantasia was founded in 1996 by President Pierre Corbeil with friends Martin Sauvageau and André Dubois. A year later, newly minted International Programmers Mitch Davis (now Fantasia's Artistic Director and Director of International Programming) and Karim Hussain (today one of horror's top cinematographers) came all the way down to NYC to personally invite me to attend that summer's second edition. I also helped the guys unofficially book so many films (Satoshi Kon's anime stunner *Perfect Blue* among them) that during my virgin visit, Corbeil offered me a job: to join the guys for year three.

2. My first big Fantasia get? John Carpenter's *Vampires* in 1998, with the man himself making a rare stage appearance at the fest's original home, the landmark Cinema Imperial. The taciturn *Halloween* architect thoroughly enjoyed himself and didn't bat an eye when a potential stalker in full Michael Myers garb rushed the autograph line.

3. That same year, Fantasia's mission continued to expand from Asian action flicks to embrace more international genre cinema (especially horror). Pushing the wave: world premieres of movies like *Phantasm IV: Oblivion*, with series creator Don Coscarelli and star Angus Scrimm hosting.

4. Fantasia jumpstarted North America's J-Horror craze, and I quickly became addicted after watching the 1999 bow of Hideo Nakata's now classic *Ringu*. Ground-breaking works by Takashi Miike, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Takashi Shimizu, and Sion Sono further fueled the addiction.

5. Peter Filardi's still-unreleased *Ricky 6* debuted at Fantasia in 2000, with Filardi and his young cast (including soon-to-be-stars Vincent Kartheiser and Emmanuelle Chriqui) hitting the town.

6. In 2003, genre fave Ray Wise stayed for ten days (!) to champion his films *Jeepers Creepers 2* and *Dead End*. We bonded every morning over breakfast, and when it came time to drive back to Brooklyn, Wise surprised me by wheeling out the luggage cart himself to my double-parked car outside the hotel.

7. I fraternized with Spanish horror legend Paul Naschy in cities all over the world, but I never saw my friend happier than when Fantasia unspooled his most personal work, 2004's *Rojo Sangre*.

8. As a long-time kaiju geek, I drove nine hours straight and plopped myself in the seat at Concordia Hall Theatre for 2004's *Godzilla: Final Wars*. What a treat to see the Big G's original films uncut on the big screen and not some badly dubbed U.S. TV version.

9. One of our most erudite guests was Denmark's Nicolas Winding Refn, who attended in 2005 with his blistering *Pusher II*.

10. When the dreaded Canadian distributor flatly rejected our request to play 2009's I*nglourious Basterds*, Quentin Tarantino himself stepped in on my behalf and saved the day. No stranger to Fantasia, *Inglourious* actor/fest fave Eli Roth attended in his place.

11. "I'm not worthy!" shouted actor Jay Baruchel on his knees and bowing at my presence, leaving me completely flabbergasted before his film screening,

PHOTOS BY & COURTESY OF KING-WEI CHU

2010's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Turns out that the Montrealer grew up reading FANGORIA and attending Fantasia!

12. Director Ted (*Weekend at Bernie's*) Kotcheff never made a horror film, but his once-missing 1971 "lost weekend" outback drama *Wake in Fright* terrified us just the same. Fascinating tale spinner Kotcheff proved to be such a great raconteur during our 2011 *WIF* revival that Fantasia brought the octogenarian back to present his restored *First Blood* in 2019.

13. Over-the-top movies such as 2019's *Ready or Not* seem tailor-made for Fantasia. The sold-out audience of 700 went wild for this hilarious gorefest, buoyed by appearances by perky star Samara Weaving and pre-*Scream* directors Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett.

14. "I see you dressed for the occasion," Mark Hamill sarcastically sniped at me when I ran into him in the hotel lobby. Attired in gym shorts and a sweaty tank top, I never expected to stumble into the actor and his posse from the 2012 crime thriller *Sushi Girl*. "That's just Mark's sense of humor," the film's writer/producer Destin Pfaff reassured me later. The ecstatic viewers got more samples of that humor during the Q&A with the *Star Wars* god.

15. In the same year (2013) that Fantasia opened with the mega-hit *The Conjuring*, the fest world scream-iered the direct-to-DVD *Curse of Chucky* with franchise father Don Mancini and his lead actresses. After waiting nine long years since Chucky's last escapade, the crowd went nuts!

16. Fantasia followed Britain's Edgar Wright from the start, delivering showings of *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010). But it took 2013's *The World's End* to get him and star Nick Frost in the flesh to Montreal!

17. Tobe Hooper had always been a little skittish about meeting his fans. However, the chance to behold his restored *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* theatrically and to receive the prestigious Cheval Noir lifetime achievement award enticed Hooper to take part in Fantasia 2014. He loved every minute and even accompanied the staff on late-night revels.

18. In 2015, Kevin Bacon and pre-*Spider-Man* director Jon Watts arrived at Fantasia to support their terrific thriller *Cop Car*. Over dinner, the actor enjoyed talking up his then-current TV series *The Following*.

19. The fans *did* hold their breath during Fede Álvarez's suspenseful *Don't Breathe*, which Screen Gems sneaked to Fantasia 2016 nearly a month before their theatrical release.

20. I'd been trying in vain to get Guillermo del Toro to Montreal forever, and I finally succeeded in 2016. Before his Oscars glory, Fantasia bestowed upon the Mexican maestro a Cheval Noir. During his inspiring Master Class, del Toro again proved he's "one of us."

21. For fun, while introducing 2017's *Lights Out*, I asked the theater DJ to play the Peter Wolf song of the same name. I called up two volunteers from the audience, and we began boogying to the catchy tune. "Start the movie already!" someone screamed. Luckily, the heckler enjoyed the 2017 film more than my impromptu dance-off.

FANTASIA'S *NIGHTMARE CINEMA* PREMIERE (L TO R): THE AUTHOR, JOE DANTE, MICK GARRIS, RYÛHEI KITAMURA, AND ALEJANDRO BRUGUÉS.

22. The event's 22nd edition kicked off with a gala world premiere of *Nightmare Cinema*. Directors Mick Garris, Ryûhei Kitamura, Alejandro Brugués, and Joe Dante assembled for the warmly received anthology, with Dante also collecting a well-deserved Cheval Noir.

23. The entertaining zombie musical *Anna and the Apocalypse* brought the Fantasia house down in 2018. Scottish director John McPhail was such a charmer that *everyone* wanted to take him home.

24. For 2020's "COVID edition," John Carpenter (virtually) returned to Fantasia to accept his own Cheval Noir. Check out his Master Class on Fantasia's YouTube Channel.

25. "Yo, Tony," wrote writer/director James Gunn, whose *Tromeo and Juliet*, *Super*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy* all played previous editions. "Love Fantasia. Who are you talking to, and what's the snag?" Gunn was referring to an impassioned email where I asked for his help in putting Fantasia's studio request to pre-open with *The Suicide Squad* back on track. We'd been shot down for the silliest of reasons. A few hours later, thanks to industry heavyweight Gunn, a red light turned green, giving Fantasia the ultimate 25th-anniversary gift: an advance showing of *The Suicide Squad*.

For 28 years, Fantasia has been cultivating goodwill with filmmakers (new and old), studios, and insiders worldwide. When people like Gunn go to bat for you, it's an affirmation that you must be doing something right. Look for me in the Fantasia audience this summer as I forge new moviegoing memories. 💀

THE AUTHOR WITH THE GREAT GUILLERMO DEL TORO AND HIS CHEVAL NOIR AWARD.

the VIDEO EYE of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

by Anthony Everitt

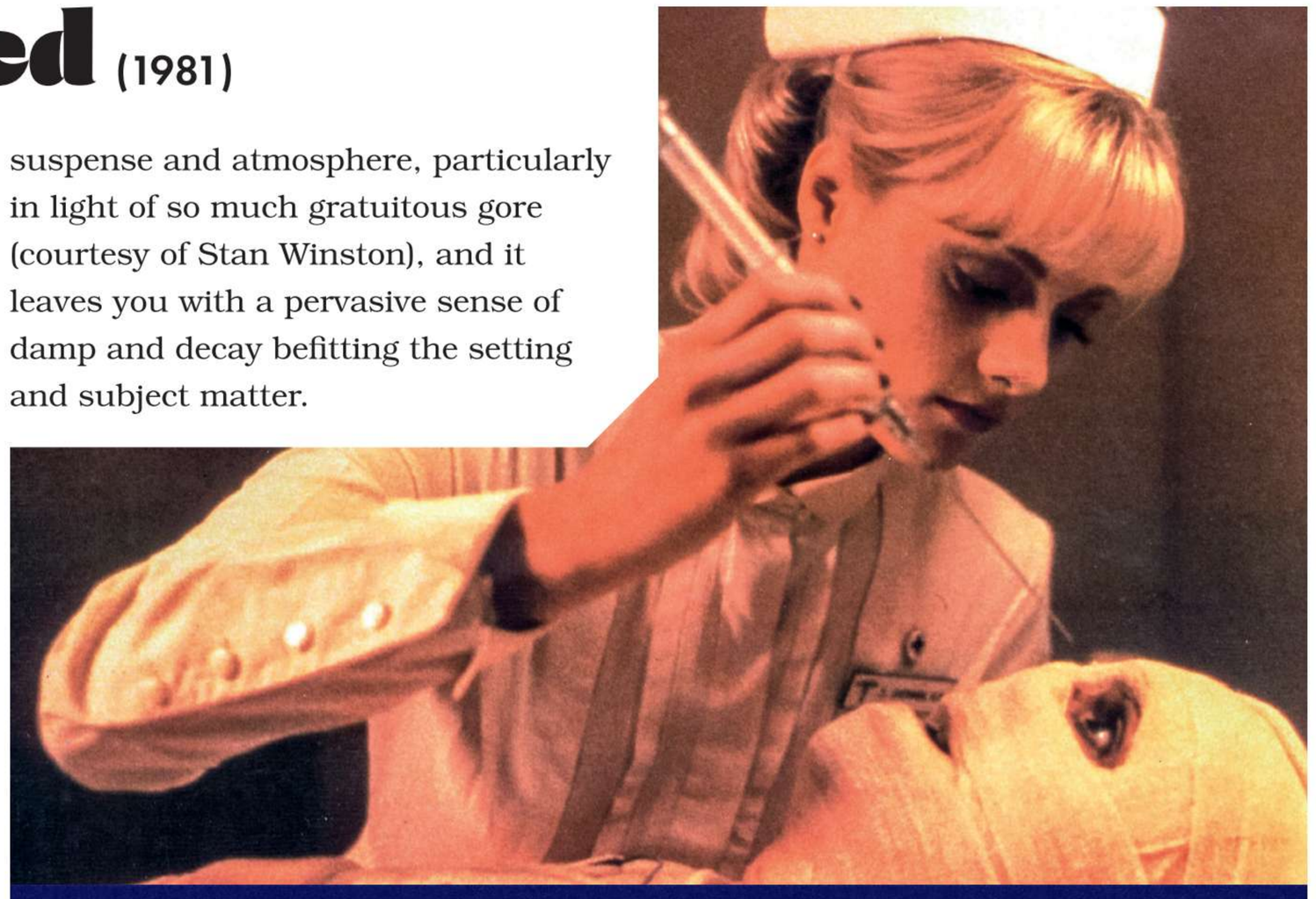
The roaming peepers of Dr. Cyclops' progeny continue their search for the weirdest retro watches.

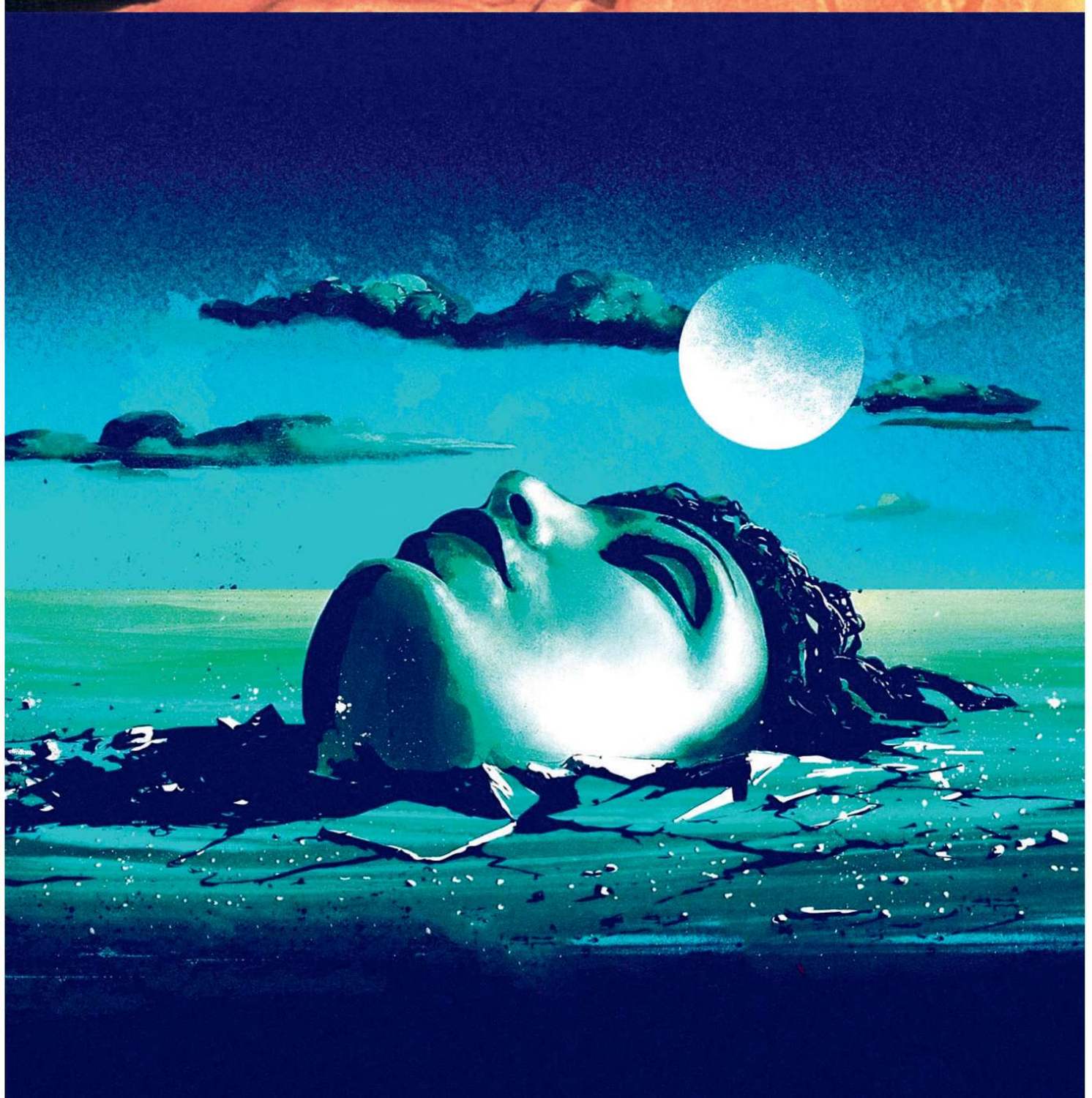
Dead & Buried (1981)

We've all been there: you're in the middle of dinner at the in-laws', attempting to jockey the conversation away from politics by screaming "How are they still talking about trading Pete Alonso?" when your nephew suddenly interrupts with some spiel about knife sets he's selling. Gross, right? Now imagine it's your friends or neighbors, or even your spouse, violently murdering you to make you dependent on mortuary reconstruction and cosmetics to preserve a lifelike, toned appearance for eternity. Honestly, I don't know how these MLM types sleep at night. But since William Dobbs became the coroner and sole mortician for Potters Bluff, there seems to be more and more of them around.

To be fair, his motivations are only partly financial. He's mostly just into practicing his "art," which is understandable. When you get good at something it can become difficult to stop. I imagine this is especially true once you've perfected the process of reanimating corpses and periodically restoring their mangled features so they can pass in polite, undecomposed society.

Unfortunately, Dan O'Bannon didn't get to practice his art on Ronald Shusett's script as indicated by the top billing, but that nevertheless speaks to the talent of Shusett. For a film with so many twists and turns, the plot flows at a very efficient and exciting pace without leaving the viewer with too many questions. The camerawork and direction sustain a surprising level of suspense and atmosphere, particularly in light of so much gratuitous gore (courtesy of Stan Winston), and it leaves you with a pervasive sense of damp and decay befitting the setting and subject matter.





PHANTASM (1979)

I'll never understand why this movie has such broad appeal. It's just bizarre; the plot, story, settings, all the characters governed almost exclusively by dream logic. No traceable causality whatsoever for a majority of the runtime. So many unanswered questions: who is the Tall Man? Exactly when did Reggie graduate high school? Who is the subtly snarky Black lady who suddenly pops up in Jody and Mike's house, never to be seen again? A lot of Freudian hacks would probably tell you it's all about the fear of death, without ever asking themselves what exactly is so fearful about it. Well, I'll tell you: the drop in productivity.

Hear me out: at what point do you see anybody performing a scrap of honest work? Sure, you got bartenders and ice cream men galore. But I'm talking about real man's work. Yes, this is a town crippled by the burden of its own idleness, no place for an innocent boy with relatable anxieties over his own redundance and the final clock-out at the end of a useless life, like all children.

With all this repressed despair, Mike naturally blames the Job Creator for his own inadequacies, but this Tall Man presses on nobly in the face of unfair misrepresentation, molding an army of industrious little zombie people out of the raw ore of lazy deadbeat townies. That's it, that's the movie. Except the parts where the Tall Man transforms into a woman to induce an orgasm in his male victims before stabbing them, then reveals his true face as they die – not sure what that means.

PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES (1966)

It may seem like all Cornishmen would love to spend the afterlife tin mining for a landed whey-faced deviant, but it turns out some coercion is required. Let's face it: left to their own devices, corpses are lazy. Especially when they're mostly still alive and have some quaint, provincial misgivings about a "cursed mine." Fortunately, there's a privileged dickhead affirmative action program for black magic in Haiti, so this Squire Hamilton got to fast-track his Voodoo priest certificate and get down to the business of reviving dearly departed Dad's defunct operation via a workforce of undead zombies. Who says a liberal arts education is useless?

Unfortunately, nobody told the townsfolk, who start to get pretty irate that their friends and relatives keep dying for no apparent reason. And things really come to a boil when their new young doctor insists on some finicky nonsense called a "post-mortem," so, in desperation, he calls in his trusty old professor, Dr. Forbes, for backup. Joke's on everybody, though, because some corpses have to work for a living and don't have time to submit to an autopsy.

As per *Dracula*, things escalate when the female lead's friend is finally struck down after dwindling for a while under the bad guy's subtle influence and her surviving lover-boy must be a party to her posthumous decapitation. The whole story is indebted, but the writing is incisive and original. Visually, it's a gloomy feast, and clever how the initial vaguely ominous backdrop of the mining machinery gradually builds with the plot into an undeniable looming presence.

By Scott Wampler

Rose Red

The Stephen King x Steven Spielberg Collab That Almost Was

In the mid-'90s, Stephen King and Steven Spielberg came very close to working together on the haunted house movie to end all haunted house movies. So, what the hell happened?

For years, Stephen King had wanted to write a screenplay about a haunted house. Partially inspired by an allegedly haunted home in King's hometown of Durham, Maine, and partially inspired by Robert Wise's 1963 film *The Haunting* (not to mention Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, which inspired Wise's film), King crafted an all-new story about a team of psychics who investigate the goings-on at a sprawling and deeply haunted mansion known as Rose Red.

King took the concept to Steven Spielberg, who sparked to the idea, and soon enough a screenplay was written... which is where this particular project began falling apart. Spielberg and King found themselves at an impasse, with the director reportedly wanting more thrilling set pieces and action sequences and King wanting to lean harder into the story's horror elements. Despite their best efforts to find a middle ground, the project ended up getting shelved, and the two parted ways amicably.

That friendly divergence turned out to be fortuitous: several years later, King decided he wanted to take another crack at the screenplay, and bought back the rights from Spielberg. King completed another version of the script, and made a few attempts to get other filmmakers interested (Mick Garris, who'd helmed several projects based on King's work, including miniseries versions of *The Stand* and *The Shining*, passed on the project when it came his way) before convincing producer Mark Carliner to produce it as a feature. King was due to begin revisions towards the end of June, 1999, but before work could begin the author was struck by a van while taking a walk near his home in Maine. Once again, King's haunted house project was put on hold.

Not for long, however! King's accident had taken him out of commission for a little while, but he found solace in the act of writing, which King claimed "worked better than anything [the doctors] were giving me to kill the pain," and after a brief period of recuperation and extensive surgery, he turned his attention back to *Rose Red*. Though he'd originally imagined the project as a feature, he now expanded it into a three-part miniseries, something that would greatly increase the amount of breathing room he'd have to tell his sinister story.

That story, by the way, had changed somewhat in between the version King was crafting with Spielberg and the version he now sought to turn into a miniseries. What was once a more direct homage to Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* became something a bit more complicated, taking inspiration from San Jose's famed Winchester Mystery House and adding a narrative wrinkle wherein Rose Red could appear bigger on the inside than it appeared on the outside (an idea that must have been in the air at the time: Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, which dealt with a similar concept, was published the following year).

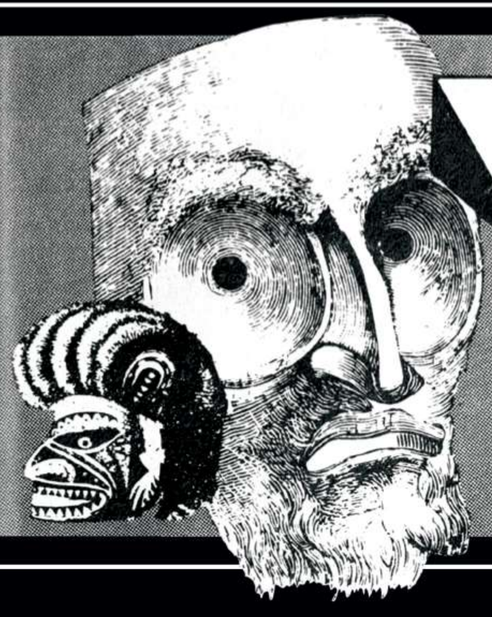
Carliner remained on the project as a producer as it turned into a miniseries, where he was joined by fellow producers Thomas H. Brodek and Robert F. Phillips. The team then hired Craig R. Baxley, a director they'd previously worked with to great success on another King project, 1999's *Storm of the Century*, and by the following summer the miniseries was in production. Featuring a cast led by Nancy Travis and featuring memorable performances from folks like Melanie Lynskey, Julian Sands, and Jimmi Simpson, it debuted on ABC in January of 2002. Reviews were strong, viewers tuned in by the millions (an average of 18.5 million across the miniseries' three parts), and King finally completed his quest to make his big haunted house project.

Recently, *Rose Red* was made available to watch via Hulu, making the series accessible to an entirely new generation of King nerds. It holds up remarkably well some 20+ years later, particularly in its production design (headed up by Craig Stearns) and in its VFX, which were created by Academy Award-winning visual effects supervisor Stuart Robertson. It is most successful, however, in the rich background that King brings to both *Rose Red*'s characters and its narrative; it's unlikely that all of the detail King crafted for the series would have made its way into the feature film adaptation of this particular story. It might not have been the big screen blockbuster he originally imagined, but it did turn out to be one of the best miniseries ever to carry his name. Funny how things work out sometimes, ain't it? 💀

THE KING SITS IN FRONT OF ROSE RED MANSION (SEATTLE'S THORNEWOOD CASTLE).

You can listen to Scott Wampler (@ScottWamplerRIP) and Eric Vespe (@EricVespe) every Wednesday on THE KINGCAST (@Kingcast19), a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives, brought to you by the FANGORIA Podcast Network.

THE KINGCAST



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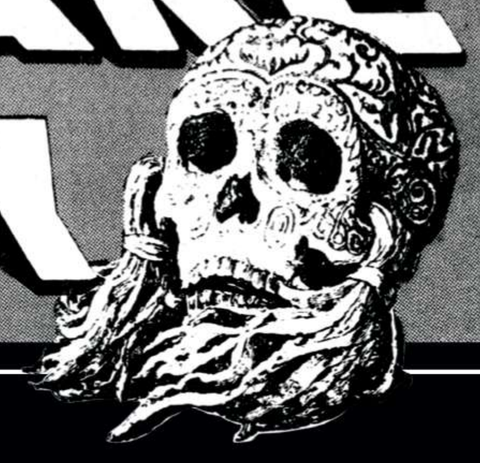
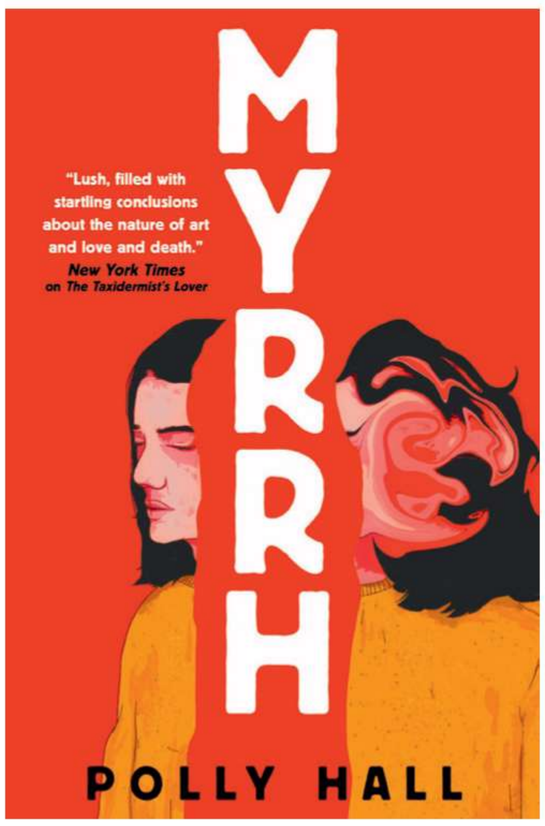


BY AHLISSA EICHHORN


MYRRH
"Lush, filled with startling conclusions about the nature of art and love and death."
New York Times
on The Taxidermist's Lover
POLLY HALL

MYRRH

DUE OUT:
04/09/2024

AUTHOR:
Polly Hall

PUBLISHER:
Titan

Myrrh has a goblin inside her. It's the tormenting companion that screams in her head, telling her that she was an unwanted and unloved child. Now as an adult, she seeks out her birth parents for answers and for ways to silence the goblin for good.

Cayenne dreamt of a fairytale ending when she married her husband. Their bond has weakened, and the love has since faded. Lonely and starved for affection, she plans to have a baby of her own. The trials of these two women intermingle at curious intersections, goading them toward a climax both surreal and horrifying.

Author Polly Hall's motherhood theme is presented through opposing experiences. One character wants to know why she was a discarded baby; the other wants a baby more than anything. Readers will sympathize with both women, but those feelings will shift closer to the finish line. The horror aspect of the book comes to life whenever the goblin speaks. He's a nasty creature that only spits appalling dialogue. His presence in the story is a curious but totally necessary one. On Cayenne's end, her inner thoughts spiral downward — fast. Her nightmares are comforting, and her delusions become commonplace. It's within her chapters that the story turns demented.

Myrrh is an affair about family, as well as self-worth. The subjects of lineage and identity throttle you to reexamine them right from the start. Fans of the genre will enjoy the hot-and-cold spectrum of emotions of the book. Tearjerking revelations and belligerent fits of gore can live in harmony on a single page.

"A HOUSE OF WOMEN AND SHADOWS BUILT FROM POETRY AND REVENGE." — MARIANA ENRIQUEZ
Woodworm
Layla Martínez
TRANSLATED BY SOPHIE HUGHES & ANNIE MCDERMOTT

WOODWORM

DUE OUT:
05/14/2024

AUTHOR:
Layla Martinez

TRANSLATED BY:
Sophie Hughes,
Annie McDermott

PUBLISHER:
Two Lines Press

When the son of a prominent family goes missing in a rural Spanish village, all fingers point to one household. The home was built generations ago from sin and secrets. The grandmother and granddaughter that reside there are chained to it by bitter obligation. Rumors say they speak to saints and cast spells on nervous neighbors. Rumors say they're evil. Unable to leave or change their circumstances, the two women take on the accusations and work to enact their own semblance of justice. Whatever the whispers say, they must keep all others from the house that lives and breathes the past.

Martinez makes the contempt of her characters their dominant trait. They're unapologetic about their wrongdoings and are quick to defend them. More than anything, they're angry. The entire novella is a lesson of anger's effect on society. The overarching theme is classism, and the paced undressing of history reveals the resentment and desperation the villagers have toward an abusive upper class. There's an odd sense of comradery in this sort of disdain. The reader connects with the frustration and makes further connections to the hatred and misogyny embedded in the plot. One could describe the house as "typically" haunted, but Martinez stresses that atrophy is normal for this family; the shadows do not disturb them. The spirits here crawl under beds and slip by in dark hallways. Grotesque secrets burrow into the walls. Yet, prayer cards and belief in angels exist under the same roof.

What gives *Woodworm* its spark is its balanced complexity. So much is packed in and all of it unfurls like silk ribbon. It's a mystery. It's a political commentary. It's a genre-pleasing paranormal tale. Never is it too busy or distracted from its purpose. Every word is charged with menacing magic and readers will willingly fall victim to its curse.

QUIET HORROR. MODERN HORROR. A24-TYPE SHIT. WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT, THIS KIND OF GENRE STORYTELLING IS RISING IN POPULARITY. It gets a bad rep sometimes for not delivering the goods fans expect. That's not the case here. All four books below are certified head trips that refuse to fall neatly under the confines of a single subgenre. They spatter where they please, but it's a safe bet to call them speculative horror. Place your preconceptions on hold and get some thrills away from the vampires and slashers.

GHOSTROOTS: STORIES

DUE OUT:
05/07/2024

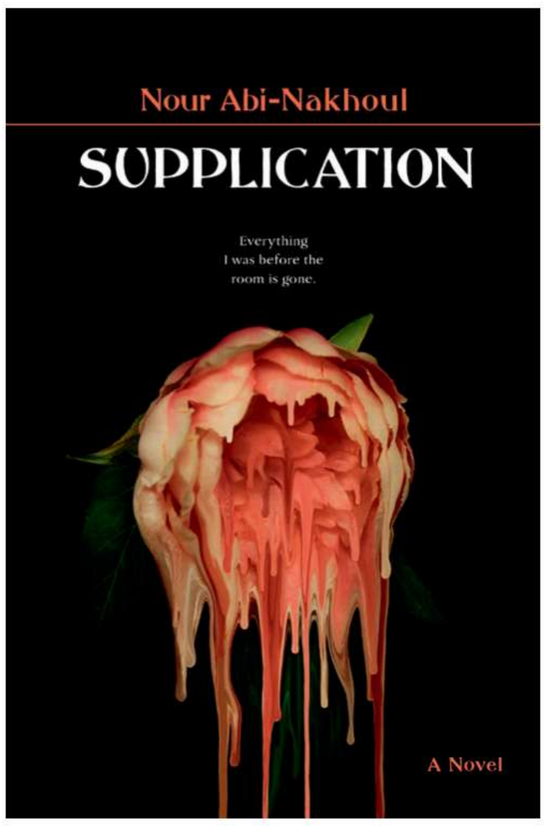
AUTHOR:
'Pemi Aguda

PUBLISHER:
W.W. Norton & Company

Ghostroots hosts 12 short stories from debut author 'Pemi Aguda. These tales are based in Nigeria and augment the unsettling side of human emotion with supernatural flair. A bad case of reincarnation brings terror to one family. A lethal visitor infects an entire street with panic. When a debtor can't pay their share, something more precious than money is taken. A cognizant house protects its owner in a sinister way. These and other cutting stories guide you through cultural myths and traditions for a brand-new literary horror experience.

Structure can make or break a collection. It's a delicate science figuring out what should kick-start the reading experience, what should close it, and what should even be included in it. *Ghostroots* is constructed to withstand any storm. It uses a shared universe, but each short has undeniable individuality. The collection starts out strong by putting its best horror foot forward with "Manifest" and its wicked take on possession. Forgiveness is put to the test in the eerie "Breastmilk," while "The Hollow" plays on a classic trope that warrants every horror fan's attention. The mood shifts closer to speculative and surrealism the further you read, yet never loses its edge.

The rich, consistent setting is as transportive as it is essential. Aguda's native home of Lagos is the omnipresent voice throughout, dazzling you before showing you its darkened innards. It exposes the fear behind tradition and duty. Evocative as it is chilling, *Ghostroots* will rattle any kind of genre reader.



SUPPLICATION

DUE OUT:
05/07/2024

AUTHOR:
Nour Abi-Nakhoul

PUBLISHER:
Strange Light

Supplication begins with an unconscious woman tied up in a stranger's basement. The man responsible stands over her when she comes to, silent and motionless. After their encounter, she drags herself out into a new grimdark world, one with black hallucinations and insights that her humanity has never shown before. The longer she walks on in this reality, the more feverish and guttural it becomes. To supplicate is to ask for something earnestly, and this protagonist is on a mission to plead for her deepest desire in this foreign hellscape.

The sense of uncertainty trumps the sense of mystery in *Supplication*. Readers themselves wake up in a strange place alongside the protagonist. You're not sure if you're dead or alive, what's real and what's not. It's akin to rocking a VR headset in an existential nightmare game but there are no universal rules in this bizarre arena. The author's style is rooted in body horror with Cronenbergian handguns, viscous ooze pouring from slits, and violent fantasies squirming together. Readers may experience revulsion and widening eyes during these juicy moments. The overall writing style is heady and dreamlike, letting every scene slowly melt until hit with a bit of unexpected carnage.

The novel carries with it a scared wonderment. It ponders human experience and what our ultimate purpose is. Being left alone to contemplate that is harrowing enough for most people. Abi-Nakhoul didn't write a cut-and-dry sci-fi horror story to make that pill go down any nicer. It's a beastly amalgamation of genres and vibes that assaults the question. In plain English, it's a sublime mind-bender that's ominous from start to finish.

Contributors' Crypt

Here's where you can follow some of our contributors on Instagram. Be polite!

Sean Abley ..... @seanabley

Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton

Dane DiLiegro ..... @dd

Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines

Stephen Graham Jones ..... @stephengrahamjones

Ama Lea ..... @missamalea

Rebekah McKendry .@rebekahmckendry

Ve Neill ..... @therealve

Richard Newby ..... @rnewb

Devon Sawa ..... @d.sawa

Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire

Scott Wampler ..... @mayorofdoorcity

Things to Come

Things will heat up this summer as we celebrate the return of the Xenomorphs with *Alien: Romulus*, the return of M. Night Shyamalan with *Trap*, and the return of Osgood Perkins (and Nic Cage) with *Longlegs*! Return yourself, and we'll celebrate that too!

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Your favorite non-binary horrorcore rapper Hoodie Hilltop here reminding my lovely readers to stream my new *Twin Peaks* themed album "A New Red Room" on any major streaming service (releases 02/24/2024)

Give the *Spooky Doings* podcast a listen! 2 improv comedians talk about horror, interview filmmakers, conduct tutorials and more. Available on Apple, Spotify and podbean.

Bring your party back from the dead. Talk to the living! Get your ghoulish guests gabbing with a game of "Halloweeja." It's the ultimate blend of all things All Hallows' Eve in a board game. 4-10 Players. Ages 13+. Available exclusively on TheGameCrafter.com

Hey Girl! It's CB. When I turn threes will you marry me so we can eat chili, drink papa juice, and listen to Kennys forever?

Hi Fango horror fans! Lots of content out there but wanted to let you know about my podcast - *The Scary Movie Project*. Just released the 75th episode about *Nosferatu*. Give it a listen!

The sleeper has awakened...

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My only goal in life is to get my name in print in FANGORIA! Salutations and splatters from Australia. Dwight Bandy.

DEAR MoM, Thank you for ALWAYs letting me have my FANGO Subscription even though you don't like the HORROR. LOVE, sHANE

Chilly - If it's in Fango, you have to do it. Let's finally get you to watch *Halloween*! Baby Annie, Kiki, Mama, Avocado and Cil will hold your hand. Love Beast

Rosey, are you reading this? A Fango editor is the biggest Talkville fan EVER.

Love Horror? Check out your new favorite 3 postal workers talk Horror on their podcast...*Hack Stab Slash*!!!!! Available everywhere!

Kyle! I finally made it to the ad vault. It's chilly in here and it's strange that they locked the door but I can't deny that it feels like home. I love you, AS, and SS!

"No full moon. No silver bullets. No chance." Check out THE BEAST OF LOUGHBY ISLAND, the new werewolf horror novella by Matt Doyle, now!

Witch Hunter by Matthew Snope now on Amazon

45+ years later from Elyria, Ohio, ART FALCON still rules!!!

Congrats, Son of Cyclops; love, the House of 'Clopses.

Who the heck is Reggie Zreejex?

Kiss me in the middle of Piz Gloria, baby.

The CULTSHOW - Live Genre Youtube show and podcast looking for subs and luvs. Discussions, games & laughter in every episode! Available on YouTube and all podcast platforms.

Shoutout to Fango's bandana model Pepe the pug.

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MAIKA MONROE AND NICOLAS CAGE

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WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY OSGOOD PERKINS

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Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian

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